
THE FIRST Australian and New Zealand edition of this popular American dictionary was published in 2006. It was a landmark achievement, with its Asia-Pacific orientation in both content and style. For instance, entries included the “bluebottle jellyfish”, common to Australasian waters. Local spelling and phonetic pronunciation guides were also provided.

However, almost as soon as it was published, the need for a continuing process of review and revision was recognised. And so, editors-in-chief Peter Harris, Sue Nagy and Nicholas Vardaxis led a team of 60 specialists to produce further refinements, which resulted in this second edition.

The language of medicine is constantly evolving to keep up with the latest developments in research and technology. Thus, some of the new terms in the second edition include Hendra virus, Nipah virus, swine flu and vancomycin-resistant enterococcus.

There were some 40 000 entries and 2400 colour images in the first edition. More than 500 images, 300 drug entries and 73 tables have been added or updated in this edition. The many useful appendices cover areas such as nutrition guidelines, immunisation schedules, infection control and herb–drug interactions. Charts and graphs range in content from lung sounds and burn depths to contraceptive effectiveness and cardiac arrhythmias.

Simple devices such as extensive cross-referencing and a thumb-style index make navigation easy.

The bonus “Evolve” website access provides many free online resources, such as all the images from the book, directories of key health organisations and health promotion information. This strategy has enabled the dictionary to be confined to a single volume that is still kept current through the website.

This dictionary can help health professionals and students become familiar with new medical terminology and techniques, and thus improve their communication and outcomes. Certainly, as a proofreader for the Journal, I’m sure to refer to it at least once a week.

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When one joins a profession it is easy to lose sight of how difficult it can be for the average person to understand the words or phrases we commonly use. We become blinded to the use of these terms due to our familiarity with them and can forget that they are not part of common language. This applies especially to public facing disciplines like medicine but it occurs in most professional fields. In this post I would like to cover some common words that are used medically that would be useful for patients to know. These are words that I have personally come across people misunderstanding and o