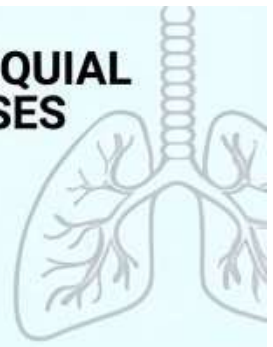


HEALTH BELIEFS, EUPHEMISTIC TERMS AND COLLOQUIAL EXPRESSIONS SURROUNDING ASTHMA DIAGNOSES ENCOUNTERED IN PRIMARY CARE



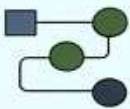
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Introduction



Using euphemisms in clinician-patient communication highlights cultural taboos, stigmas, and power dynamics. Clinicians often use gentler terms to prevent psychological distress, while patients use them when unready for a diagnosis.

Methods



We asked the Asthma Right Care network to state typical examples of negative responses to an asthma diagnosis encountered in practice and the euphemisms used by patients and clinicians. We also added terms found in the literature.

Results: The Psychological Drivers of Language



Avoidance Driven by Stigma

Patients may reject a diagnosis due to cultural taboos and social stigmas, such as fears regarding family reputation and a daughter's marriageability.

Listen to the podcasts (QR code) debating asthma diagnosis denial



The Trap of Clinical Paternalism

Clinicians often use soft language to "protect" patients from perceived psychological harm, unintentionally preventing them from understanding the chronic condition.



Results

Common Euphemisms (Avoidance label)

"Wheezy bronchitis"

"Reactive airways disease"

"Just allergies"

Patient Denial Responses (Medical Reality)

"It's only anxiety/stress. My lungs are sensitive to dust-stress."

"I don't have asthma. I only have asthmatic bronchitis."

"My daughter will not get married if she is diagnosed."



Linguistic Mirroring

To build rapport, clinicians frequently adopt patient's euphemisms, which inadvertently validates patient's denial of their condition.

Discussion

While intended to minimize discomfort, colloquialisms and soft language can cause harm by fostering misconceptions and an increased risk of treatment non-adherence.



Risk of Treatment Non-Adherence

Translating into Practice

IPCRG Milestone: Behaviour change forum theatre Workshop on asthma diagnosis denial; 13th World Conference (Tunis 2026). <https://www.ipcr.org/tunis2026>

Next Steps & Future

Future Initiatives: Developing awareness materials for primary care clinicians, alongside patient leaflets and visual aids to enhance communication during consultation.

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