Response to Jackler et al. "Otolaryngology: 'It's All Greek to Me''"

Justin S. Golub and Kris S. Moe

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What is This?
Response to Jackler et al. “Otolaryngology: ‘It’s All Greek to Me’”
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With enthusiasm, we read your article “Otolaryngology: ‘It’s All Greek to Me’” and welcome the dialogue you encouraged. We spend considerable effort educating not only patients but also nurses, allied health professionals, and even physicians on what our field does and what it is supposed to be called. We have explored, as you have insinuated, alternative brands for our appellation. For example, when signing inpatient orders, we have tried penning “OHNS,” only to be promptly paged by nurses inquiring what service the patient was just transferred to.

We want to point out one additional curiosity regarding our specialty’s name that has baffled us. The official name of our field as defined by AAO-HNS branding has historically been “Otolaryngology—Head and Neck Surgery,” using a long dash (called an em dash by those in the publishing industry) rather than a hyphen.¹⁻³ This symbol does not appear on American keyboards. To insert it on a PC, one must press the Alt key and then, on the number pad, the code 0151. Calling this esoteric is an understatement. Equally mysterious, this symbol was quietly changed in the 2008 rebranding of the official logo of the AAO-HNS.⁴ The official name now contains what appears to be a medium dash (an en dash, or Alt-0150 on a PC), also not present on a keyboard. It is thus practically impossible for the lay public and nearly all professionals to correctly type the official name of our field.

We think this serves as an instructive lesson that the practicality and usability of our specialty’s name should be emphasized. One straightforward solution is simply to use “Head and Neck Surgery.” This eliminates the awkward dash, is all encompassing, and conveys to patients in plain English (not Greek) exactly what we do.

Justin S. Golub, MD
Division of Otology, Neurotology, and Skull Base Surgery, Department of Otolaryngology—Head and Neck Surgery, University of Cincinnati, Cincinnati Children’s Hospital Medical Center, Cincinnati, Ohio, USA
Email: justin.golub@uc.edu
Kris S. Moe, MD
Division of Facial Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery, Department of Otolaryngology—Head and Neck Surgery, University of Washington, Seattle, Washington, USA

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