

## VIEW AND REVIEW

# Anti-epileptic drugs: Is terminology appropriate? A change might be needed

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The term “anti-epileptic drug” refers to the currently available medical treatment against epilepsy. A discussion amongst the authors was sought to critically examine the term and identify possible issues. Translations in other languages were retrieved from literature and the usage confirmed by correspondence with native users of the language working in the medical field. The aim of this article is to initiate a debate by highlighting some negative undertones attached to this terminology.

“Epileptic” is essentially understood as a person with epilepsy. The word has heavily stigmatizing undertones in many countries where misconceptions about the disease are rampant. An “Anti – epileptic drug” can then be easily construed to imply that the drug is against an “epileptic” that is a person with epilepsy.

It is also scientifically incorrect since the currently available medications are anti-seizure and not curative (anti epilepsy). Thus, “anti-seizure” is scientifically more accurate.<sup>1</sup>

Another issue is that whether the therapeutic substances used for epilepsy should be referred to as “drugs”. There is no distinction between the terms ‘drug’ and ‘medicine’ in the English medical literature. In the community however, ‘drugs’ have extended aspects pertaining to law, illegality, and prohibitions, whereas ‘medicines’ do not. ‘Drugs’ do not necessarily have a therapeutic/curative function (i.e. people use them to feel in a particular way) as opposed to ‘medicines’ which are by definition therapeutic.

While in English the word ‘drug’ encompasses medicines and non-therapeutic recreational substances, most other languages have separate words for ‘drug’ and ‘medicine’. Importantly, the translation for ‘drug’ is perceived to mean

only non-therapeutic recreational substances and has negative connotations. The above holds true for various languages; namely French (*drogue, médicament*), German (*droge, medikamente*), Russian (*narkotikov, medikamenty*), Swedish (*droger, medikamenter*), Spanish (*droga, medicina*), Turkish (*uyu turucu, ilaç*), Japanese (*doraggu, kusuri*), Hindi (regional slangs for ‘drug’, *dawai* for medicine), Khmer (*thnam, tham p t*), Persian (*dava, daru*), Arabic (*eghar/mokhader, moxadder*) and many dialects.

One may argue that the treatments against other diseases such as hypertension and diabetes are also referred as anti-hypertensive and anti-diabetic respectively. However, these diseases do not have stigmatic and psychological connotations; this is where epilepsy stands out. Epilepsy can be extremely stigmatizing and anything that might promote stigma should be driven out. Even if the association of the term “anti epileptic drug” with stigma is not strong enough; other issues raised in this article bring out a need for improvement in the current terminology.

In conclusion, we urge that steps should be taken to initiate a debate on the ongoing use of the term “anti-epileptic drug” and revise it as necessary.

## DISCLOSURE

Conflict of interest: None

## REFERENCES

1. Temkin NR. Antiepileptogenesis and seizure prevention trials with antiepileptic drugs: meta-analysis of controlled trials. *Epilepsia* 2001; 42:515-24.