

Medical Jargon: The Unseen Barrier in Patient Care

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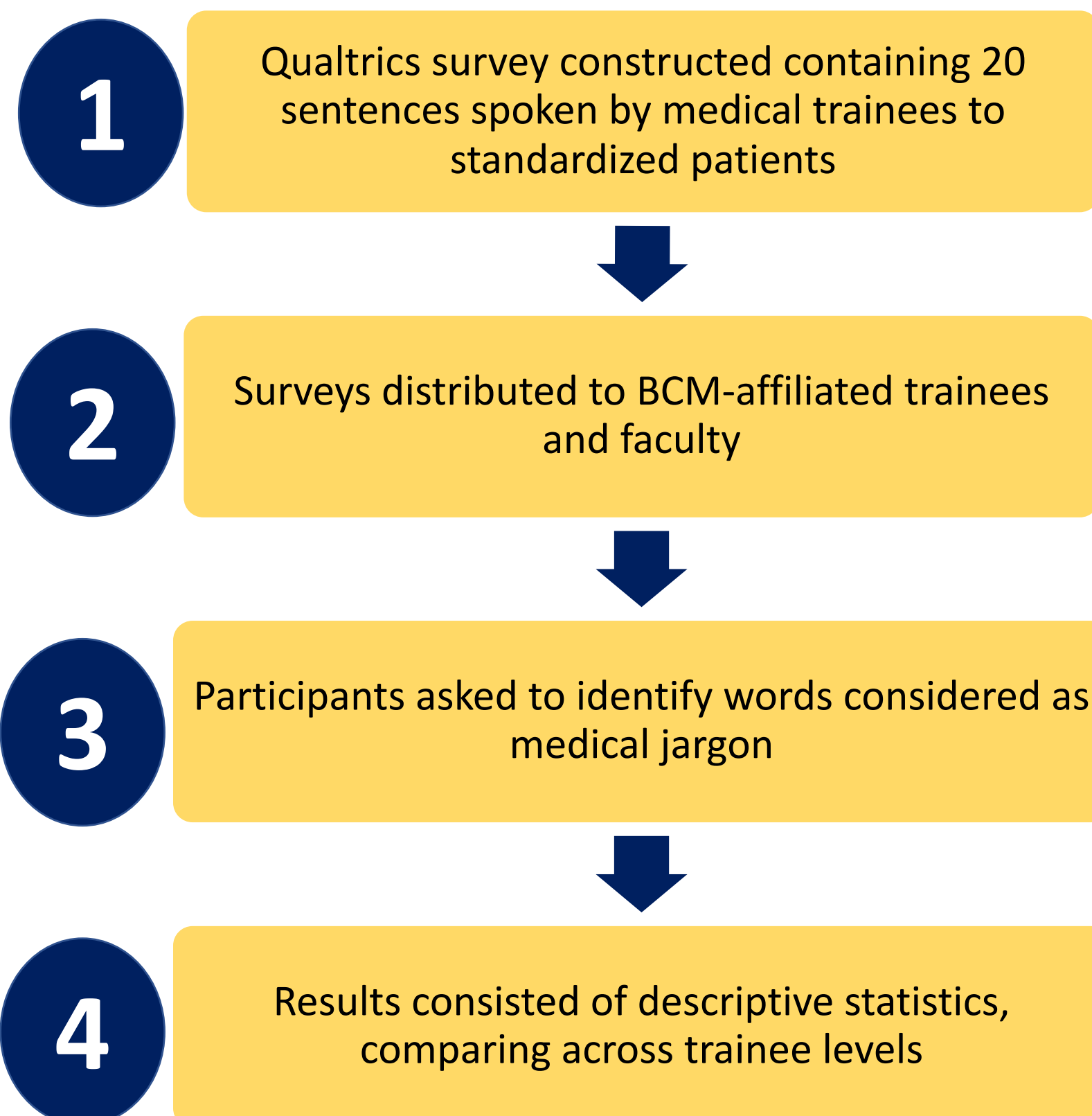
Background

- Medical jargon are words with specific medical meanings not commonly understood by the public.
- Nearly 80% of primary care appointments including at least one instance of unexplained jargon and an average of more than four uses of jargon per visit.¹
- The use of medical vernacular can impede informed or shared parent decision-making.²

Project Aims

- To describe differences in recognition and perception of medical jargon among medical students, residents, and faculty.
- To quantify variations in understanding of medical jargon by level of training.

Methods



Results

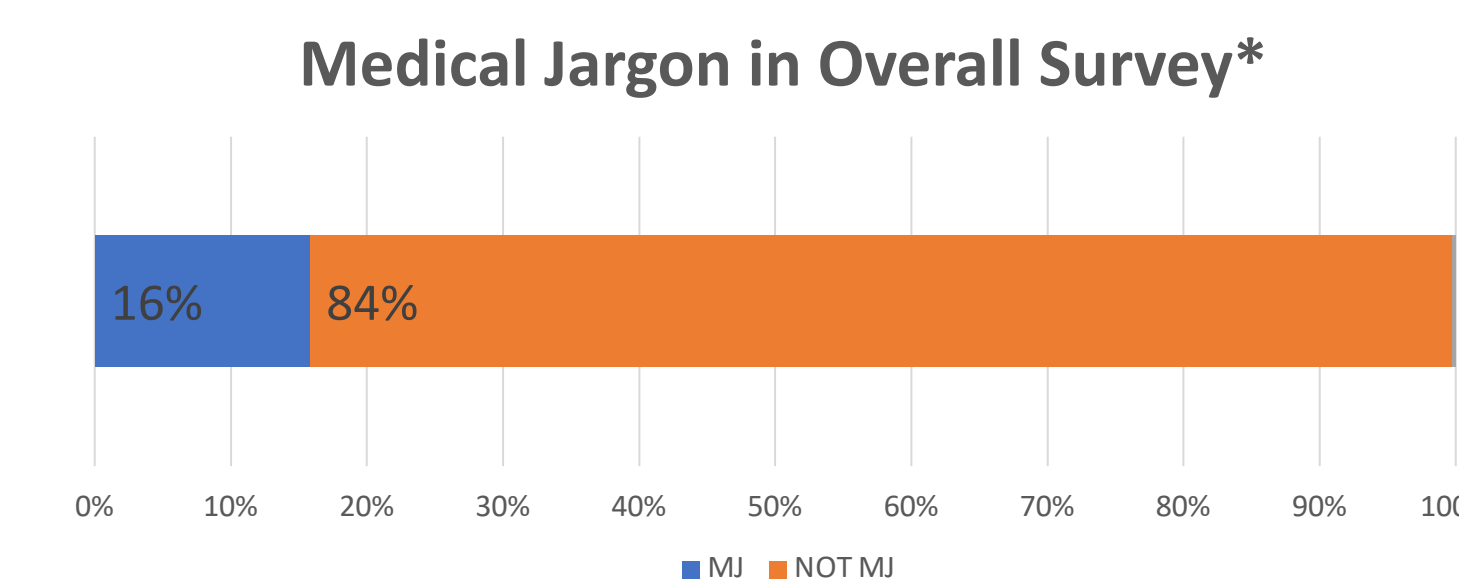
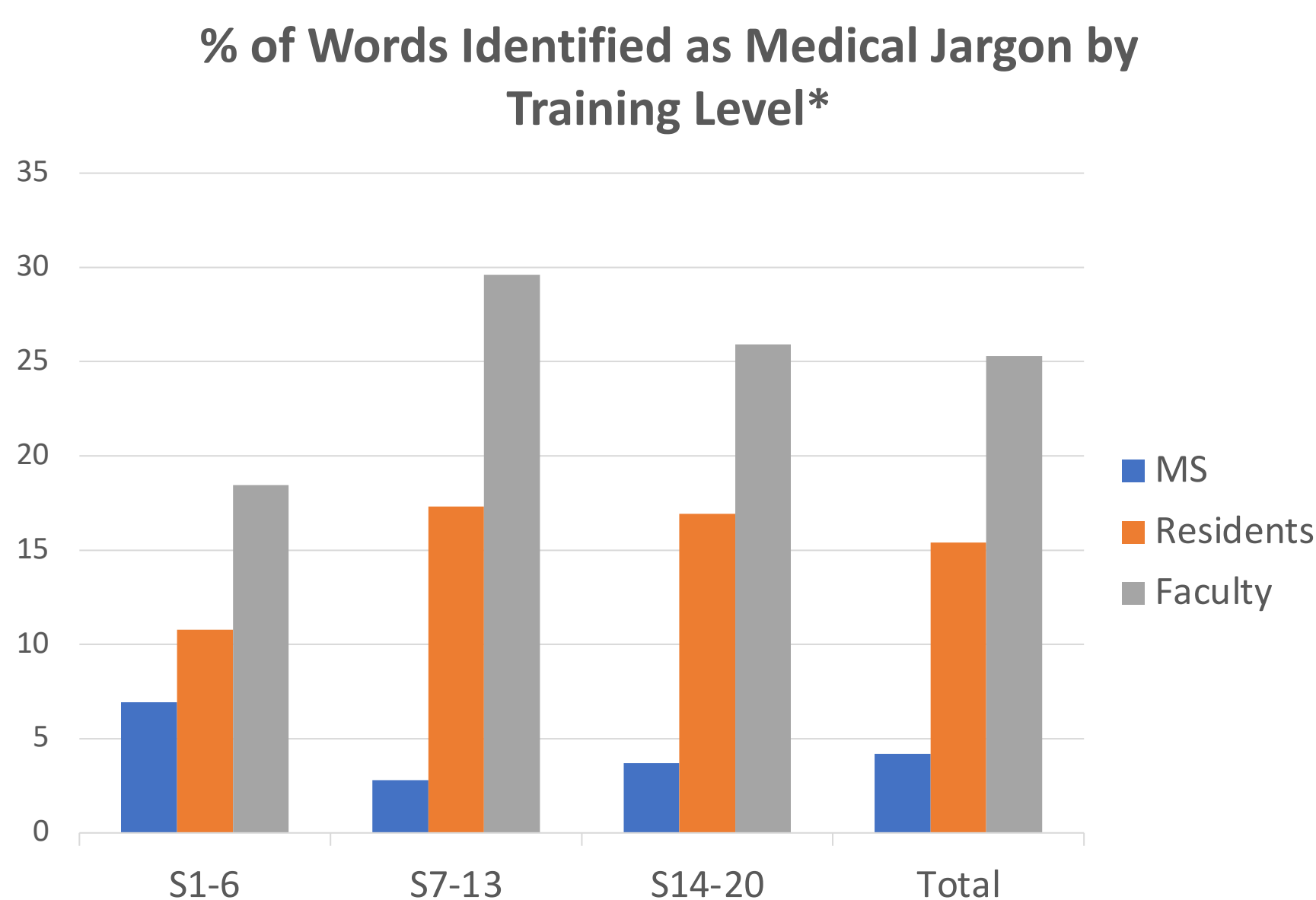
A total of 85 individuals responded to the survey, including 22 medical students (MS), 28 residents, and 35 faculty.

Sample Survey Responses

Sentence #3	Today,	I'll	be	talking	to	you	about	your	son's	test	results
MS											
Resident										28.6% (n=8)	14.3% (n=4)
Faculty										27.3% (n=9)	27.3% (n=9)
Total										20% (n=17)	15.3% (n=13)

Sentence #6	We	did	the	test,	and	they	came	back.	It	was	positive.
MS											33.3% (n=7)
Resident				25.0% (n=7)							57.1% (n=16)
Faculty				24.2% (n=8)		3.0% (n=1)			3.0% (n=1)	3.0% (n=1)	69.7% (n=23)
Total				17.6% (n=15)		1.18% (n=1)			1.18% (n=1)	1.18% (n=1)	54.1% (n=46)

Sentence #19	There's	a	mild	chance	of	an	allergic	reaction
MS							14.3% (n=3)	4.8% (n=1)
Resident			21.4% (n=6)	10.7% (n=3)			53.6% (n=15)	46.4% (n=13)
Faculty			18.1% (n=6)	21.2% (n=7)	6.1% (n=2)	6.1% (n=2)	63.6% (n=21)	48.5% (n=16)
Total			14.1% (n=12)	11.8% (n=10)	2.35% (n=2)	2.35% (n=2)	45.9% (n=39)	35.3% (n=30)



Differences in Words Identified as Medical Jargon

	MS	Residents	Faculty
%	4.21%	15.46%	25.3%
Δ Faculty	21.8%	9.8%	-
Δ Residents	11.25%	-	-

* Threshold for words identified as medical jargon was 5% of respondents

Discussion

- More terms were labeled as medical jargon at higher levels of training.
- Our study was limited by a small sample size from a single medical school.
- This increased self-awareness of what constitutes jargon vocabulary may encourage providers to 1) utilize different words when engaging in conversations with patients and 2) more proactively ask patients to verify understanding.
- This will ultimately lead to more effective communication and better patient outcomes.

Future Directions

- Organize structured focus groups to further discuss how to gauge health literacy levels, verify patient understanding, and ensure effective communication.
- Explore the possibility for educational interventions at the early trainee level regarding the importance of engaging in conversations without the usage of medical jargon.

References

1. Miller, Ann Neville, et al. "Use of Seven Types of Medical Jargon by Male and Female Primary Care Providers at a University Health Center." *Patient Education and Counseling*, vol. 105, no. 5, 2022, pp. 1261–1267., <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pec.2021.08.018>.
2. Links, A.R., et al. "Surgeon Use of Medical Jargon with Parents in the Outpatient Setting." *Patient Education and Counseling*, vol. 102, no. 6, 2019, pp. 1111–1118., <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pec.2019.02.002>.