

UCLA

American Indian Culture and Research Journal

Title

Glossary

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/7mx6f3x2>

Journal

American Indian Culture and Research Journal , 16(3)

ISSN

0161-6463

Author

Justice, James W.

Publication Date

1992-06-01

DOI

10.17953

Copyright Information

This work is made available under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial License, available at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>

GLOSSARY

COMPILED BY JAMES W. JUSTICE

***Adenocarcinoma:** A form of cancer that involves the cells lining the walls of many different organs in the body.

Adenoma: A benign tumor sometimes found in the liver, pituitary, bowel, thyroid, or other glands.

***Antibody:** A protein in the blood that fights against an invading foreign agent (antigen). Each antibody works against a particular antigen.

Astrocytoma: Benign or malignant tumor of the brain, arising from the supporting cells in the central nervous system called *astrocytes*.

***Barium enema:** The use of barium sulfate introduced into the intestinal tract by an enema to allow x-ray exam of the large bowel.

Benign tumor: A tumor from cells that do not travel to distant sites (metastasis) and do not invade the local tissues. Benign tumors can be fatal if vital tissue is involved or is compressed by their growth.

***Biopsy:** The surgical removal of a small piece of tissue for microscopic examination to determine if cancer cells are present. Biopsy is the most important procedure in diagnosing cancer.

***Breast self-exam (BSE):** A simple procedure to examine breasts thoroughly; recommended once a month for all women between regular physician checkups.

***Cancer:** A general term for a large group of diseases (more than one hundred), all characterized by uncontrolled growth and spread of abnormal cells. Cancer cells are abnormal and eventually form tumors that invade and destroy surrounding tissue; they may even spread via the lymph system or bloodstream to distant areas of the body. (See *metastasis* and *malignant tumor*.)

***Cancer cell:** A cell that divides and reproduces uncontrollably.

***Carcinogen:** Any substance that initiates or promotes the development of cancer. For example, asbestos is a proven carcinogen.

Carcinoma: A malignant growth from cells that originate in the ectoderm (one of three cell [germ] layers in the embryo).

***Carcinoma in situ:** An early stage in development, when the cancer is still confined to one layer of tissue. In situ carcinomas are highly curable.

***Cervix:** Any "necklike" structure; usually refers to the neck of the uterus where cancer may occur.

Cholelithiasis: Stones in the gallbladder.

Chordoma: A benign tumor of the spinal cord.

Clinical: A symptom (i. e., pain) or a sign (i. e., abnormal x-ray or lump) noticed by a person afflicted or by an examiner.

***Clinical trial:** A scientific evaluation of a technique, drug, and/or therapy to prevent, detect, diagnose, or treat disease in human beings. Clinical trials are conducted after experiments in animals have shown evidence of potential effectiveness and preliminary studies in humans suggest usefulness.

***Colon:** The part of the large intestine that extends from the end of the small intestine to the rectum.

***Colonoscopy:** A technique used to examine the entire colon visually by means of a lighted, flexible instrument, called a *fiberoptic colonoscope*. This procedure may also obtain biopsy specimens of suspicious tissue.

Colorectal: The area of the large bowel that includes the colon and/or the rectum.

Craniopharyngioma: A benign tumor that involves the pituitary gland at the base of the skull.

Cytology: Study of cells under a microscope. Cells that have been sloughed off or scraped off organs, such as the uterus, lungs, bladder, or stomach, are microscopically examined for signs of cancer. Also called *exfoliative cytology*.

***Detection:** The discovery of an abnormality in an asymptomatic or symptomatic person. *Early detection* is the discovery of an abnormality by health professionals through a special effort designed to screen for asymptomatic disease, or by people themselves who have been made alert to the existence of signs or symptoms.

***Diagnosis:** The process of identifying a disease by its characteristic signs, symptoms, and laboratory findings. In patients with cancer, the earlier the diagnosis is made, the better the chance for cure.

***DNA:** Deoxyribonucleic acid. One of two nucleic acids—the other is RNA (ribonucleic acid)—found in the nucleus of all cells. DNA contains genetic information on cell growth, division, and function.

***Endometrium:** The inner mucous membrane that forms the uterine wall. Endometrial cancer generally affects women between fifty and sixty-four years old.

***Endoscopy:** Any procedure that uses a hollow, tubelike instrument to visualize and biopsy otherwise inaccessible areas of the body, such as the esophagus, stomach, colon, bladder, or lung.

***Epidemiology:** Study of disease incidence and distribution in populations as well as the relationship between environment and disease. Cancer epidemiology studies how physical surroundings, occupational hazards, and personal habits (smoking, diet, and lifestyle) may contribute to the development of cancer.

Ependyma: A malignant tumor of the nervous tissue occurring in the brain or spinal cord.

Ewing's sarcoma: A specific malignant growth primary to the bone, usually occurring during childhood.

Fibroadenoma: A benign tumor of the skin or connective tissue.

Gastric: Pertaining to the stomach.

***Genes:** Located in the nucleus of the cell, genes contain hereditary information that is transferred from cell to cell. A process called *genetic engineering* may be used eventually to modify heredity and correct impaired immunity.

Guaiaic: A chemical used to find blood hidden in stool.

Hematopoietic: Pertaining to cells of the bone marrow that make red and white blood cells.

Hemocult: Trade name for a guaiac-based test chemical used to find hidden blood in stool.

Hepatic: Pertaining to the liver.

***High risk:** When the chance of developing cancer is greater than that normally seen in the general population. Patients may be at high risk from many factors, including heredity (e. g., a family history of breast cancer), personal habits (e. g., smoking), or the environment (e. g., overexposure to sunlight). (See *risk factor*.)

Histologic type: The exact name of the cells from the tumor as seen under a microscope.

Hodgkin's disease: A malignant tumor of blood cells arising in lymph nodes.

***In situ:** In place; localized and confined to one area. A very early stage of cancer, before it has metastasized.

***Incidence:** The extent to which disease occurs in the population. Cancer incidence is the estimated number of new cases of cancer

diagnosed each year.

***Leukemia:** Cancer of the blood-forming tissues (bone marrow, lymph nodes, spleen). Leukemia is characterized by the overproduction of abnormal, immature white blood cells.

***Lymph gland:** Also called *lymph node*. These glands produce lymph. They normally act as filters of impurities in the body.

Lymphocytic: Referring to cancers that arise from white blood cells called lymphocytes.

Malignant: A tumor whose cells travel to distant sites (see *metastasis*) and/or invade the local tissue.

***Malignant tumor:** A mass of cancer cells. A malignant tumor may invade surrounding tissues or spread to distant areas of the body. (See *metastasis*.)

***Mammography:** A screening and diagnostic technique that uses low-dose x-rays to find tumors in the breast. Mammography can reveal a tumor too small to be felt even by the most experienced physician. The procedure may be used as a detection test in all women of the appropriate age group who do not have symptoms. All suspicious breast lumps must be biopsied to determine whether they are cancer.

***Melanoma:** A type of skin cancer. While most skin cancers rarely spread to other areas of the body and are easily treated and cured, melanoma can be extremely aggressive if not detected early.

Meningioma: A benign tumor arising from cells of the tissue covering the brain or spinal cord.

Mesothelioma: A tumor, usually malignant, arising from cells of the middle germ layer of the embryo (the mesothelium). It is usually located in the chest or abdomen.

***Metastasis:** The spread of cancer cells to distant areas of the body by way of the lymph system or bloodstream. The term *metastases* refers to these new cancer sites.

***Morbidity:** Sickness. The term usually refers to the proportion of people with an illness.

***Mortality:** Mortality rates reflect the number of deaths in a given population.

Multiple myeloma: A cancer that arises at several sites at the same time in the bone marrow from white blood cells named *myelocytes*.

Myelocytic: Referring to cancers that arise from white blood cells named *myelocytes*.

Nasopharyngeal: Pertaining to the tissues in the nose and upper portions of the throat, above the tongue and palate.

***Neoplasm:** Any new, abnormal growth. Neoplasms may be benign or malignant, but the term is generally used to describe a cancer.

***Oncologist:** A physician who specializes in cancer treatment, after undergoing extensive training and examinations.

***Oncology:** The science dealing with the physical, chemical, and biologic properties and features of cancer, including causes and the disease process.

Osteosarcoma: Malignant tumor of the bone.

***Pap test:** Developed by the late Dr. George Papanicolaou, it is a simple microscopic examination of cells. This test can detect cancer of the cervix at an early, highly curable stage. (See *cytology*.)

Parotid: A major salivary gland located near the ear canals on the face.

***Polyps:** A nodular growth of tissue developing in the lining of a cavity, such as the colon, the nose, or the vocal cords. Polyps may be benign or malignant.

***Precancerous:** Abnormal cellular changes that are potentially capable of becoming cancer. These early lesions are very amenable to treatment and cure. Also called *pre-malignant*.

***Prevalence:** The number of patients with a disease in the population at a specific time. For example, the prevalence of esophageal cancer is higher in Blacks than in whites.

***Prevention:** The reduction of cancer by eliminating or reducing contact with carcinogenic agents. A change in lifestyle such as stopping smoking, for example, can help prevent lung and many other cancers.

Primary site or primary cancer: The specific organ or tissue where the tumor originated.

***Prostate:** A gland located at the base of the bladder in males.

***Rectum:** The last five to six inches of the colon leading to the anus.

***Regional involvement:** The spread of cancer from its original site to nearby surrounding areas. Regional cancers are confined to one location in the body.

Renal: Pertaining to the kidney.

Retinoblastoma: The most common primary malignant tumor of the eye in childhood, primary to the layer of cells in the retina.

***Risk factor:** Anything that increases an individual's chance of getting a disease such as cancer. For example, the major risk factor for lung cancer is cigarette smoking. The major risk factor for skin cancer is overexposure to the sun.

***Risk reduction:** Those techniques used to reduce the chances of developing cancer. For example, low-fat diets may help reduce the risk of breast cancer.

Sarcoma: A malignant growth from cells that originate in the endoderm (one of three cell layers in the embryo).

***Screening:** The search for disease such as cancer in individuals without known symptoms. Screening may refer to coordinated mass programs in large populations.

Secondary site or secondary cancer: The organ or tissue where

cells (see *metastasis*) from the original tumor have established more tumors.

***Secondary tumor:** A tumor that develops as a result of metastases or spreading beyond the original cancer.

Serological: Blood tests done after clotting has occurred and the clot has been discarded.

***Sigmoidoscopy:** The visual inspection of the rectum and lower colon by a tubular instrument called a sigmoidoscope passed through the rectum. The instrument may be either rigid or flexible.

***Squamous cell carcinoma:** A form of skin cancer that usually appears as red, scaly patches or nodules, typically on lips, face, tips of ears but also in other sites such as the cervix and lungs. It can spread to other parts of the body if untreated.

***Staging:** An evaluation of the extent of a disease such as cancer. A classification based on stage at diagnosis helps determine appropriate treatment and prognosis.

Subclinical: The presence of a disease, or a cancer, without symptoms or ordinary signs that may be detected by uncommon blood or imaging tests.

Teratoma: A sometimes malignant growth from all three germ layers. Most are benign.

***Testes (testicles):** The two male sex organs suspended in a pouch, called the *scrotum*, below the penis.

***Testicular self-examination (TSE):** A simple manual examination of the testes. Should be performed monthly.

***Tissue:** A collection of similar cells. There are four basic types of tissues in the body: epithelial, connective, muscle, and nerve.

***Tumor:** An abnormal tissue swelling or mass; may be either benign or malignant.

***Ultrasound examination:** The use of high frequency sound waves

to locate a tumor deep inside the body. Also called *ultrasonography*.

Wilm's tumor: A specific malignant growth primary to the kidney, occurring during childhood.