

Editorial

Changing the nomenclature: fashion or necessity?

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In the current issue of *Allergy* the European Academy of Allergology and Clinical Immunology publish their position paper concerning nomenclature in allergology. It was already some time ago that the nomenclature was adapted, and it was felt by some EAACI members that in view of the increased knowledge about the allergological mechanisms, and the sometimes confusing terminology used today by allergologists and organ specialists, a revision of the nomenclature was necessary.

The main aim of the task force responsible for the position paper was to try to harmonize the existing terminology and to get rid of terms that are obviously not anymore in line with the actual knowledge about the pathophysiology involved.

Some terms are already in use since at least a century (and sometimes a millennium) and thus a long time before it was known what the basic mechanisms of disease were. Examples are asthma, hay fever and eczema. Hay fever is, in fact, a totally wrong term, which is not used anymore in professional medical language, but still persists in the lay language. Asthma and eczema are terms that do not really tell us something about the etio- or pathophysiology of the disease, but they describe a certain syndrome of symptoms that everybody understands. There are, of course, at regular intervals some finer identifications of the definition of these diseases, but in general these terms became an inherent part of the medical nomenclature. Asthma and

eczema will not easily disappear from the medical vocabulary, because they do not evoke any wrong perception.

The task force had most difficulties with the definition of "atopy" and "atopic dermatitis". These terms are so widespread, like "hay fever", although most of the time erroneous, that it was difficult to redefine their real meaning or to find other terms that can replace them. When "atopy" is defined in a specific way, all terms with the prefix "atopic" should be in line with the definition of atopy. However, it is the task of every scientific society, such as EAACI, to ensure a correct terminology, no matter how difficult it may be to question the correctness of long existing and widely used terminology.

An additional difficulty in defining terms related to allergy is that allergology is a horizontal speciality, involving a whole series of "vertical" or organ specialities. This implies a close collaboration between the specialists of the various disciplines concerned. To obtain this goal, representatives of all specialities were actively involved in the task force along with allergologists and clinical immunologists.

Finally, it does not make much sense to write a position paper on nomenclature for a particular continent, such as Europe, if the nomenclature is not applied to the whole world. Therefore, we hope that this document will form the basis for a worldwide task force establishing a nomenclature that can be used in the whole world.