

Choose Your Words Carefully, Please

S. Dean Stacy

To the Editor—I enjoy the NCMJ for the insights it provides for our region and read a considerable amount of each issue. However, I would like to express my concern with some terminology that is unfortunate, as well as inappropriate, that seems to be creeping into the literature, so as to protect our nomenclature from cultural bias.

Specifically, in the case of the article, Drug Use Trends for Arthritis and Other Rheumatic Conditions and Effect of Patient's Age on Treatment Choice (November/December 2011), the designation of "...adults (19-64 years) and the elderly (≥ 65 years)..." found on page 433 in the last paragraph of the introductory section is representative of a disturbing trend of ageism in our culture. I suspect it was an innocent error.

I have worked many years with older adults and have found that a disturbing percentage of the general public, as well as health care providers, treat the "elderly" as less than adults. When we proceed to label older adults as less than adults, by referring to them as "elderly" and omitting the word "adult" altogether, it follows that they will be at risk of being treated as less than adults. Eventually, the general

public as a whole acquires our descriptors and the mold is cast.

It would be more appropriate to use the age descriptors alone, rather than implying that our "elderly" must be less than "adults" since that word was not used in the title to describe them.

I used the word "creeping" in the second paragraph on purpose. It takes only a disregard of this minor infraction to allow growth to the larger harmful event.

Thank you for providing an avenue that the authors of this study and others use to share their knowledge. NCMJ

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