Nosology, Nosocomial

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Nosology can mean either a text dealing with diseases, or a classification system. It first appears in English in Nathan Bailey's *An Universal Etymological English Dictionary, a Treatise Concerning Diseases* in 1721, which ran to many editions. Post-classical Latin *nosologia* provides its origin in a work title in 1615. In French we have *nosologie*, in Italian *nosologia* and in Spanish *nosología* – all dating from the mid-18th century.

Ephraim Chambers' *Cyclopædia, or, an Universal Dictionary of Arts and Sciences* published in 1728 informed its readers of:

'The second branch considers the diseases of the human body, their differences, causes, and effects; and is called nosology, when it examines their differences.'

Nosology was frequently taught without therapeutics [Lancet 1827, 17 Nov., p. 252].

A nosologist is a student of or expert in nosology, and a nosographer is someone who systematically describes or classifies diseases.

In Greek *nosos* meant disease, and *komein* was to take care of; the combination gave us *nosokomein* – to tend to the sick: hence nosocomial refers to a hospital or infirmary, and specifically to a disease acquired in hospital.

Nosocomial illnesses were so named in Victorian times. In 1853, for example, Robley Dunglison in his *Medical Lexicon. A Dictionary of Medical Science*, spoke of nosocomial, as relating to a hospital, and mentioned 'nosocomial or hospital fever'.

There are other combination forms, for example nosognomonic (the physician's diagnostic art), nosocome, nosography, all ultimately of Greek origin. And, for those of an anxious temperament, nosophobia is the fear of disease.