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), *nosography*, all ultimately of Greek origin. And, for those of an anxious temperament, nosophobia is the fear of disease.