

**Classifying Pharmacy Items:
Integrating Medical and Pharmaceutical Classification Systems, Controlled
Vocabularies, and Authority Lists into Collections Management Systems**

Shaelyn Ryan, Medical Artifact Collection at Western University
February 2024

Collections Care for Historical Pharmaceutical Collections Resource Package

Table of Contents

Database Checklist	3
Authority Lists and Controlled Vocabularies	4
Incorporating Medical and Pharmaceutical Vocabulary into Authority Lists.....	5
Medical Subject Headings (MeSH).....	7
Making Vocabulary Accessible.....	12
Employing Controlled Medical Vocabularies and Structures in Databases.....	13
Classification Systems	16
How to Classify Pharmaceutical Artifacts.....	17
Classification Examples.....	20
Resources	23
Short Dictionary of Medical Terms.....	23
Medical Vocabulary List.....	39
Pharmacy Classifications List.....	45
A Word About Online Databases	53
Citations and Further Reading	54

A note: This document provides cataloguing advice from a Westernized perspective. Resources have been provided at the end to begin considering incorporating Indigenous ways of knowing.

Database Checklist

Pharmaceutical artifacts require special care not only in the ways they are physically stored, but also in the information we keep about them and how we keep it. Use this checklist to make sure that your pharmaceutical collections stay well-organized and safe for everyone.

1. **Mark as Hazardous:** Always make sure that hazardous or pharmaceutical items potentially containing controlled substances are marked in a way that is informative and visible to database users. In PastPerfect databases, a good way to do this is to use the pre-loaded “Hazardous” option in the “Status” field.
2. **Condition Hazards:** In the “Condition” field in your database, make sure to note specific hazards associated with the condition of the object. For example, if a pharmacy bottle is leaking, the container is warping, or the cork is deteriorating, these details must be noted in the database to ensure the safety of those handling the object.
3. **Handling Instructions:** In the “Condition” field or a similar, easily visible memo field, write out specific instructions on how to handle the pharmacy artifact depending on its hazard level. For example, pharmaceutical records of objects that might be dangerous to touch or inhale should instruct the handler to wear gloves and a face mask when handling.
4. **Ingredients – Safety and Legality:** In “Notes and Legal” or a similar memo field, write out a list of the ingredients contained in the pharmacy item (if it has contents) and note which ones are hazardous to health or have legal issues (consult Michelle Hamilton’s “Canadian Legislation Regulating Pharmaceutical Artifacts” fact sheet).
5. **Classifications:** Incorporate pharmaceutical and medical terms into your classification systems, controlled vocabularies, and authority lists. This will help keep items organized and accessible, and prevent cluttered data. Consult the rest of this document for further instructions and resources to help with this.
6. **Public vs. Private:** When posting your artifacts online, consider what information you may not want to share with the public. For example, you may not want to publish the location of illicit or harmful items in your collection to prevent theft. Consult the “A Word About Online Databases” section on page 53 for more detailed information.

Authority Lists and Controlled Vocabularies

Authority List

An authority list, or an authority file, here means a list of terms that is taken as the authority for which words or phrases can be entered into a particular field or fields in a database. In PastPerfect 5, authority files can be created and edited for a number of different fields under “Authority Files” in the “Setup” menu. A list of options for a particular field can usually be accessed by right-clicking the field and selecting the terms you want to add.

Controlled Vocabulary

Controlled vocabulary here refers to the set of acceptable terms, phrases, and spellings that generally appear in an authority file in a database, but can and should also be used in uncontrolled fields like description, provenance, or research entry fields.

Why are these important?

Using specific and controlled terms, phrases, and spellings in all the fields in your database helps to keep data clean, organized, and accessible. For example, having one set spelling for the word pediatrics/paediatrics, as opposed to some records using one and some using the other, keeps all the records together and makes them more accessible to researchers. Setting up authority files in your database that require certain terms to be used in certain fields makes using the agreed-upon terms easier and faster for cataloguers and thus keeps data cleaner.

Incorporating Medical and Pharmaceutical Vocabulary into Authority Lists

Contents of this section:

- Where should you use medical and pharmaceutical authority lists?
- Adding medical and pharmaceutical terms to existing authority lists in a database, using PastPerfect 5 as an example
- Medical Subject Headings (MeSH)
- Making vocabulary accessible

Where Should You Use Medical and Pharmaceutical Authority Lists?

There are generally many different fields to fill in when cataloguing any object, so which fields should contain medical and/or pharmaceutical authority lists?

Where medical and pharmaceutical authority lists and terms are going to be the most useful is in classification fields. These are any fields that are used to categorize, classify, or organize records into themes or topics to make them more accessible to researchers. In your database, these fields might be called “Topics”, “Classification”, “Subjects”, “Search Terms”, or “Category”.

Adding Medical & Pharmaceutical Terms to Existing Authority Lists

Your database likely already has a number of pre-loaded authority lists, such as lists for condition, material, location, or people. Some types of museum software, like PastPerfect 5, also come pre-loaded with authority lists in the “Classification” and “Subjects” fields. You may be using these, or you may have filled in these files with your own authority lists that are most useful for your particular collections.

Often, non-medical museums do not have sufficient terminology within their existing authority lists to cover pharmaceutical or medical objects. The instructions which follow detail how to incorporate a set of medical and/or pharmaceutical terms into your existing authority lists. PastPerfect 5 museum software will be used as an example, but other databases should have a similar function that can be found by consulting your users’ guide or reaching out to technical support staff.

Adding Medical & Pharmaceutical Terms to Existing Authority Lists

– continued –

1) Method 1: Locate Authority File and Update List

1. On PastPerfect 5, under the “Setup” drop-down menu in the upper left corner, select “Authority Files.”
2. Select “Common Screens” for classification fields and locate the field in which you want to add terms. Double click or highlight and press “Next” to open the authority file for that field. This will open the authority file.
3. Click the grey + button in the top right of the pop-up window to add a new term. Type in the desired term and press enter.

In PastPerfect 5, authority list entries can only be added one at a time. To save time by adding an entire list at once, contact the support staff at PastPerfect.

2) Method 2: Update List From Within Record

1. Open up a database record in your collection and navigate to the “People - Subjects, Classification, Search Terms” tab. Open the record for editing.
2. Click on the desired field and then right click to open the authority file.
3. Click the grey + button in the top right of the pop-up window to add a new term. Type in the desired term and press enter.

MeSH

If your collection is very medical/pharmaceutical heavy in terms of content, you may want a more robust classification system and vocabulary for your database, rather than simply adding terms into existing authority lists.

MeSH stands for Medical Subject Headings. MeSH is a “controlled and hierarchically-organized vocabulary produced by the National Library of Medicine. It is used for indexing, cataloging, and searching of biomedical and health-related information. MeSH includes the subject headings appearing in MEDLINE/PubMed, the NLM Catalog, and other NLM databases.”¹ It is also used by the Museum of Health Care at Kingston and the Medical Artifact Collection at Western University in their cataloguing systems, in addition to simpler and more accessible vocabularies.

Using MeSH is important for medical and medical history researchers because it is a true controlled vocabulary, meaning that it is used and accepted by multiple institutions and has oversight from a governing body which approves any changes or additions and prescribes how it should be used. This means that researchers can count on being able to use the same terms as access points for their research in many different institutions and not have to worry that they are missing records which are labelled with other versions or spellings of the same concept.

The following section of this document will go over MeSH rules and recommendations, how to access the terms, how to use them, and how to add them to your database.

¹ “Welcome to Medical Subject Headings,” Medical Subject Headings, National Library of Medicine, Last Modified June 8, 2023, <https://www.nlm.nih.gov/mesh/meshhome.html>.

MeSH, continued

Where to find MeSH Data

Adding MeSH as a controlled vocabulary might seem intimidating given its very large scope (over 30,000 terms) and complexity. Indeed, PastPerfect 5 and databases like it are not capable of downloading such a long, nested list into an authority file all at one time. The idea with MeSH is to add terms to your authority list as needed, which can be done in the same way as any other terms, as detailed on page 6 of this document. Carefully examine the object you are cataloguing and consult the MeSH data online to find the appropriate terms to use. There are a couple of ways you can use MeSH to find the terms you need:

To find MeSH terms in French, consult “Le MeSH Bilingue” at <https://mesh.inserm.fr/FrenchMesh/>

Two Ways to Find MeSH Terms

1. Search MeSH: If you are looking for a specific term or have a general idea of the type of term you need, use the Search MeSH function at <https://meshb.nlm.nih.gov/>. You can search a specific ingredient of the pharmacy item, a symptom or body system it treats, a quality it has, a type of medicine it is, etc. Type in your query, select “All Terms” and define whether you want an exact match or a fragment (partial match).

MeSH, continued

2. Browse the MeSH Tree: If you are looking for a set of terms that fall into a particular category, or aren't exactly sure what to search for, you can browse the MeSH data in tree view at <https://meshb.nlm.nih.gov/treeView>. This displays the MeSH from the broadest descriptors to the most specific, and you can begin narrowing down the term you need by expanding parts of the tree. For example, if you are looking for a term to describe the type of drug an object contains, you might begin by expanding the "Chemicals and Drugs" term, and then the "Pharmaceutical Preparations" term, and so on until you have narrowed it down to the most specific terms you need.

MeSH, continued

How to Read MeSH Descriptor Data and What to Do With It

Once you hit upon a term you think fits your object, you can click on it. You will be taken to a page which gives all the data for that particular term, called “MeSH Descriptor Data.” It should look something like this:

The important parts to take note of here are “MeSH Heading,” “Scope Note,” “See Also,” “Qualifiers,” and “MeSH Tree Structures.”

MeSH Heading

The MeSH Heading is the term you will use in your catalogue record and the desired authority files in your database. It can be used as a search term or classification, and can also be referenced for the proper spelling or use of a term in the other fields of your record.

Scope Note

Reference the Scope Note to be sure that you are using the correct term for your object. The Scope Note defines the meaning of the term, as well as the kind of objects it can refer to.

See Also

Consult See Also to see whether other MeSH terms might also fit your object, or might be a preferable term to the one you found initially.

MeSH, continued

Qualifiers

Qualifiers, also called Subheadings, are used alongside a heading, or “descriptor” to place it in context. The Qualifiers tab on the MeSH Descriptor Data page for a particular term lists the qualifiers that are allowed to be used with that term.

To add a Qualifier to your MeSH term in your classification list, your search terms, etc., enter it beside/after the term, separated by a slash with a space on either side. This is the way it is done by the National Library of Medicine in their PubMed database.

MeSH Tree Structures

If you found your term through the MeSH search function rather than browsing through the tree structure, the MeSH Tree Structures tab on the MeSH Descriptor Data page allows you to see the tree structure that your chosen term is a part of. This will give you an idea what other broader or narrower terms you may want to use to describe and/or classify your object.

The Rule of Three

Sometimes, many of the terms under a particular branch of the MeSH tree will be relevant to your artifact. If there are three or more on the same level of the tree, the rule is to go “up the tree” and list the broader term that covers all of them rather than listing each one individually. For example, if the pharmacy artifact you are cataloguing was made to treat more than three different terms nested under “Respiration Disorders,” you would just include “Respiration Disorders” in your catalogue record rather than listing each individual disorder. Order terms in your record from broadest to narrowest.

Making Vocabulary Accessible

When dealing with medical terminology in your database, it is important to consider the accessibility of your records to researchers, the public, and even your own collections staff. Even museums and collections that centre around a medical theme should maintain a set of medical vocabulary as well as classifications that are accessible to the general public—what might be called “layman’s terms” rather than the more complex medical/scientific terminology.

Using two sets of terms—the proper medical words and phrases in MeSH as well as simpler, more commonly used terms—allows more types of people to access and use your records, making them equally accessible to the non-medical and medical researcher. It also allows you to make wider or narrower searches through your data as desired, as more general terms will give a wider range of results, and more specialized terms will produce more specific results.

Resource Alert!

Consult the Resources section of this document for a Medical Vocabulary List (page 39) and a Pharmacy Classifications List (page 45) for your database. While MeSH should be used for precise medical terms, these lists contain general sets of medical terms you might need, and also matches specialized pharmaceutical terms to more common or general ones to aid your classification project.

Example:

Medical	General
Anodyne	Pain relief
Analgesic	
Narcotic	
Opiate	

Employing Controlled Medical Vocabularies and Structures in Databases

We've discussed authority lists and how to use controlled vocabularies from within authority files, but what about all of the database fields wherein that is not an option? We will discuss here ways that your museum can employ controlled medical vocabularies and structures in your database outside of authority files—in fields like description, research, and object name.

Keep a list of terms and spellings for cataloguers to consult

Page 23 of this document contains Resources which are divided into sections:

- Medical Vocabulary List (page 39)
- Pharmacy Classifications List (page 45)

Keep copies of the vocabulary and classifications lists available for cataloguers to consult when writing object descriptions and doing general record revisions and updates. Require that, when cataloguing a medical or pharmaceutical artifact, cataloguers check their terms and spellings against the list to ensure consistency.

Come up with an agreed upon structure for object naming

The decision of what to list as an object's name or title can be a complicated one, especially in the case of pharmacy artifacts. Naming objects consistently plays a large role in keeping artifacts organized and able to be found. Depending on existing structures in your database, you want to employ different standards for object naming for your pharmacy collections. Below are some suggested structures which may be useful to your museum:

1. Type, Title

Examples:

Medicine Bottle, Lydia Pinkham's Vegetable Compound
Ointment Tin, Rexall's Healing Salve
Anesthesia Mask, Yankauer's

Best for:

- Collections with a small number of pharmacy or medical artifacts
- Collections that already name objects based on type rather than specific qualities

2. Title Only

Examples:

Lydia Pinkham's Vegetable Compound
Rexall's Healing Salve
Yankauer's Anesthesia Mask

Best for:

- Collections with a large number of pharmacy or medical artifacts
- Collections that already name objects based on specific qualities rather than type

3. Title, Type

Examples:

Lydia Pinkham's Vegetable Compound, Medicine Bottle
Rexall's Healing Salve, Ointment Tin
Yankauer's Anesthesia Mask

Best for:

- Collections with a large number of pharmacy or medical artifacts
- Collections that already name objects based on specific qualities and then specify type

Remember, consistency is key! Choose one structure for naming and stick to it. Also remember to be consistent with capitalization and spelling—commit to either leaving everything lowercase, capitalizing the first letter of every word, or capitalizing only the first letter of the object name. Try to commit also, as much as possible, to either American or British versions of spellings.

Use spell check database function

Some museum database software, like PastPerfect 5, comes equipped with a spell check function. Use this to ensure consistency and accuracy when it comes to the spelling of your medical and pharmaceutical vocabulary. Many old or specialized medical terms will be marked incorrect by spell checkers, but there is often an option, as in PastPerfect 5, to add words to your dictionary. Checking and adding these terms will help avoid accidental use of incorrect or alternate spellings of your medical vocabulary.

On PastPerfect 5, the Spell Check button is located in the toolbar at the top of any record screen.

Classification Systems

Classifying pharmaceutical artifacts is more than simply having a list of terms that get applied to certain records. Classification is about identifying themes, allowing for narrower search results, and cross-referencing between objects. A good classification system will start broad and become narrower and more specific, and, as previously discussed, will be composed of language accessible to researchers. The chart and instructions which follow will guide you through the process of classifying a pharmaceutical artifact.

A later section of this document, on page 45, will provide a Pharmacy Classifications List which you can freely use and enter into the topics, classification, subjects, or search terms authority lists in your database to give you a controlled and limited set of classifications.

Classification Chart for Pharmaceutical Artifacts\

1. Type
2. Body Systems/Parts
 - 3a. Illnesses and Symptoms: Medical Terms
 - 3b. Illnesses and Symptoms: General Terms

How to Classify Pharmaceutical Artifacts

The first step in classifying a pharmaceutical artifact, before beginning to narrow the classifications and think about the object specifically, is to classify it as “Pharmacy.” Having a classification of “Pharmacy” alone will help keep all the pharmaceutical artifacts grouped together, and will make it clear to database users what the artifact they are looking at is in the most general sense.

1. Type

Once you have classified your object as “Pharmacy,” it is time to narrow it down a little. The first step is to determine the type of pharmaceutical it is, and this means a couple of different things:

Questions to Ask:

- What kind of substance is it? Pills? Liquid? Syrup? Ointment?
- How was it made? Is it a patent (over the counter) medicine? Was it compounded specially by a pharmacist? Is it a raw ingredient?
- Are there any other very general characteristics of note? For example, is it a homeopathic medicine? Is it prescription or non-prescription?

You may not be able to answer all of these questions, and some may not apply to your particular artifact. The idea is just to be as precise and complete as possible.

Classification Example

Pharmacy

Pharmacy, Pills

Pharmacy, Patent Medicine

Pharmacy, Homeopathic

2. Body Systems/Parts

Now that you have classified the general physical characteristics of the pharmaceutical artifact, it is time to consider its purpose. The first step in doing so is to identify which system or part of the body the medicine is supposed to work on. This may take some extra research.

Questions to Ask:

- What is the medicine for? What parts of the body does it work on?
- Does it work on more than one body system?

Some medicines may be more general or be meant to work on the body as a whole. Check out the classifications under “Body Systems” in the Classification list on page 45 for options to cover this!

Classification Example

Pharmacy

Pharmacy, Pills

Pharmacy, Homeopathic

Pharmacy, Patent Medicine

Pharmacy, Respiratory

Pharmacy, Circulatory

3a. Illnesses and Symptoms: Medical Terms

On page 12, we discussed the importance of maintaining two different sets of terms in medical classification systems: one specialized medical set, and one more general set. Starting with the medical set is often easier when dealing with pharmaceutical artifacts, because medical terms- often old or outdated ones- for illnesses and symptoms will sometimes be listed right on the packaging or labels of the artifact.

3a. Illnesses and Symptoms: Medical Terms (continued)

Questions to Ask:

- What is the medicine for? What specific illnesses or symptoms is it supposed to cure, in the most proper and specific terms possible?

Often, old pharmaceutical labels and packaging will have terms that we don't generally use anymore, even in the medical field. Use these old terms, but also be sure to try and include a modern equivalent if possible. Consult "A Short Dictionary of Medical Terms" on page 23 for help with this and with converting these terms to more general ones in the next step.

Classification Example

Pharmacy
 Pharmacy, Pills
 Pharmacy, Homeopathic
 Pharmacy, Patent Medicine
 Pharmacy, Respiratory
 Pharmacy, Circulatory
Pharmacy, Tuberculosis
Pharmacy, Catarrh
Pharmacy, Post-Nasal Drip

3b. Illnesses and Symptoms: General Terms

Now, take your medical terms and think about how they can be worded more generally and accessibly.

Questions to Ask:

- What do the medical terms from 3a mean? What terms in my classifications list are easy for a non-medical researcher to understand?

Sometimes, the proper medical term for something is already a term people use in daily life and is easy to understand. In that case, don't list it twice!

Classification Example

Pharmacy	Pharmacy, Post-Nasal Drip
Pharmacy, Pills	<u>Pharmacy, Cold Relief</u>
Pharmacy, Homeopathic	<u>Pharmacy, Decongestant</u>
Pharmacy, Patent Medicine	
Pharmacy, Respiratory	
Pharmacy, Circulatory	
Pharmacy, Tuberculosis	
Pharmacy, Catarrh	

Examples

Here are a couple examples of pharmaceutical artifacts from the collections of The Museum of Health Care at Kingston and The Medical Artifact Collection at Western University, and how they might be classified under this system.

Object Name: Dr. William's Pink Pills

Object ID: 1999.3.33

Research Facts: The package notes that it is a tonic for the blood and nerves, and contains iron and vitamin B1. Once advertised as a miracle drug for many ailments, but proved to be actually useful in treating iron-deficiency anemia.

Classifications:

Pharmacy
Pharmacy, Pills
Pharmacy, Patent Medicine
Pharmacy, Non-Prescription
Pharmacy, Circulatory System
Pharmacy, Nervous System
Pharmacy, Tonic
Pharmacy, General
Pharmacy, Anemia
Pharmacy, Iron Deficiency

The Museum of Health Care at Kingston

Examples

Object Name: Dr. Pierce's Golden Medical Discovery

Object ID: 2006.010.08.01

Research Facts: An alterative, meant to "cleanse the blood, tone the system, increase its nutrition, and establish a healthy condition." Was originally touted to cure tuberculosis and other respiratory issues, as well as liver, blood, and skin conditions.

Classifications:

Pharmacy

Pharmacy, Patent Medicine

Pharmacy, Non-Prescription

Pharmacy, General

Pharmacy, Alterative

It's okay if there is not a lot of classifications-- many medicines were advertised very generally, and sometimes bottles are empty and the form of the contents is unknown.

The Medical Artifact Collection at Western University

Examples

Object Name: Trilliin extract

Object ID: 1980.18.19

Research Facts: The bottle is filled with a liquid, and the dried rhizome and root are used as an emetic and uterine stimulant and in bladder disorders.

Classifications:

Pharmacy

Pharmacy, Liquid

Pharmacy, Non-Prescription

Pharmacy, Urinary System

Pharmacy, Bladder

Pharmacy, Gastrointestinal System

Pharmacy, Vomiting

Pharmacy, Emetic

Pharmacy, Stimulant

The Museum of Health Care at Kingston

Resources

Below are some resources for implementing controlled medical and pharmaceutical vocabularies and classification systems into your database. First is a Short Dictionary of Terms, in which you will find words commonly used on pharmaceutical packaging and what they mean to aid in classifying artifacts. Following that is a Medical Vocabulary List of general terms in alphabetical order on page 39, as well as a Pharmacy Classifications List on page 45 organized according to the classification system described on pages 16 to 19 of this document.

Short Dictionary of Medical Terms

The definitions of these terms are derived mainly from 1947's The American Illustrated Medical Dictionary, 21st Edition by W. A. Newman Dorland, sometimes supplemented by other medical dictionaries. The terms encompass commonly used historical pharmaceutical terms to describe symptoms, effects, side-effects, etc. that you might come across in your research on a pharmaceutical artifact. This dictionary is by no means exhaustive, but should help you get a good start on understanding what is meant by particular terms and how to classify artifacts associated with them. Some terms may not be used the same way in the medical field today or in older periods as they are in this dictionary—remember to always take into account the time period, and that the meanings of words can change over time.

Term	Definition
Ague	Malarial fever, or any other severe recurrent symptom from malaria
Alkaline	Has the reaction of an alkali, compounds which neutralize or fizzle with acids; usually refers to a substance of this kind that is caustic or corrosive

Short Dictionary of Terms, continued

Term	Definition
Alterant; Alterative	Restores healthy body functions
Angina	Severe, intense localized pain; often used to describe pain in the chest area due to a lack of blood supply to the heart
Anodyne	Relieves pain
Antacid	Counteracts acidity (especially stomach acid)
Anthelmintic	Remedy for parasitic worms
Antiemetic	Prevents vomiting, relieves nausea
Antiperiodic	Prevents the periodic recurrence of disease, especially malaria
Antiphlogistic	Counteracting inflammation and fever
Antipyretic	Relieves fever
Antiseptic	Prevents infection
Antispasmodic	Relieves spasms

Short Dictionary of Terms, continued

Term	Definition
Antisymphilitic	Remedy for syphilis
Aperient	A gentle or mild cathartic or purgative laxative (aids in emptying the bowels)
Aphthae	Thrush; small ulcers in the mouth or tongue that occur with aphthous stomatitis; canker sores
Apoplexy	A stroke; hemorrhage of the brain resulting in unconsciousness and paralysis; can also refer to the rupture of any internal organ resulting in it losing blood
Astasia	Inability to stand and walk
Astringent	Causes contraction of tissues to stop the flow of discharges
Biliousness	A sense of illness or malaise attributed to excessive bile secretion; includes constipation, headache, and indigestion
Bromhidrosis	Excessive foul odor of sweat
Bubo	Plural "buboes;" swelling of lymph nodes, especially in the armpit or groin
Bursitis	Inflammation of the bursa, which are fluid-filled sacs near joints meant to reduce friction between body tissues

Short Dictionary of Terms, continued

Term	Definition
Cachexia	General ill-health, malnutrition; constitutional disorder
Calculi	A hard concentration of mineral salts within the body; a stone (e.g. kidney stone)
Carbuncle	A severe boil or abscess in the skin, along with effects on the general well-being of the patient
Caries	The decay or death of a bone; dental caries refers to the decay of the enamel or dentin of teeth
Carminative	Relieves flatulence
Catalepsy	Rigidity of muscles so that they remain in whatever position they are placed
Catarrh	Inflammation of the mucous membranes, especially of the head and throat, with excessive discharge of mucus; stuffy or runny nose
Cathartic	Purgative; laxative; helps evacuate bowels
Caustic	Burning or corrosive
Chancre	A syphilitic ulcer

Short Dictionary of Terms, continued

Term	Definition
Chancroid	A non-syphilitic sore on the genitals
Chilblains	Itching and redness of the fingers, toes, and ears as the result of cold, damp weather
Chlorosis	A type of iron deficiency anemia mostly affecting girls at the age of puberty which causes a green colouration of the skin
Cholagogue	An agent that works on the gall bladder to increase the flow of bile into the intestines
Chorea	St. Vitus' Dance; a nerve disease which involves convulsions, involuntary jerking movements, etc. Now often refers to Sydenham's chorea or Huntington's disease
Cicatrices	Scars; marks left by sores or wounds (singular "cicatrix")
Coryza	Inflammation of the mucous membranes in the nose; head cold with ropy discharge from the nostrils
Counter-Irritant	Meant to irritate as a way to relieve some other irritation
Debility	Lack or loss of strength
Demulcent	A substance that soothes and relieves inflammation and irritation

Short Dictionary of Terms, continued

Term	Definition
Depilatory	Removes or destroys hair
Diaphoretic	Increases perspiration/sweat
Discutient	Disperses or dissipates diseased matter
Diuretic	Increases the secretion of urine (makes one have to pee)
Drastic	Acting with force or violence; a medicine with a harsh or severe effect
Dropsy	Now called "edema"; abnormal accumulation of watery fluid in cellular tissue or a body cavity; swelling
Dysentery	Inflammation of the intestines, particularly the colon, with blood and mucus in the stool
Dyspepsia	Indigestion; impairment of digestion
Dysphagia	Difficulty swallowing
Dyspnea	Difficulty breathing
Dysuria	Pain or difficulty in urinating

Short Dictionary of Terms, continued

Term	Definition
Ecbotic	A substance which induces contractions of the uterus to expel a fetus
Ecchymosis	Bruise; the breaking of blood vessels causing discolouration of the skin
Emetic	Causes vomiting
Emmenagogue	Stimulates menstruation
Enuresis	Involuntary urination
Epistaxis	Nosebleed
Errhine	A medicine which promotes discharge from the nose; promotes sneezing
Erythema	Redness of the skin caused by congestion of the capillaries
Escharotic	Corrosive, caustic
Expectorant	Helps expel mucus from lungs, bronchi, trachea
Fistula	A deep ulcer or hole which forms a connection between two body parts; often leads to an internal hollow organ

Short Dictionary of Terms, continued

Term	Definition
Furunculus	A boil
Gangrene	The necrosis (death) of body tissue, often accompanied or caused by infection
Goitre	Also spelled "goiter." Enlarged thyroid, causing a large swelling in the front of the neck
Gripe	Severe, often spasmodic pain of the bowels
Hemicrania	Pain in one side of the head
Hemoptysis	Spitting blood
Hemostatic	An agent that stops the flow of blood
Hordeolum	A sty
Hydragogue	Causes watery discharge from the bowels; cathartic causing watery purgation
Hypnotic	A drug that induces sleep
Impetigo	An inflammatory skin disease that occurs mainly in children causing isolated pustules or sores

Short Dictionary of Terms, continued

Term	Definition
Induration	Hard, hardening
Intertrigo	Chafed skin
Irritant	A substance that irritates
Lepra	Leprosy or psoriasis
Lumbago	Pain in the lumbar region of the back (lower back)
Marasmus	A progressive wasting away or emaciation, especially in infants, where there is no known cause
Meteorism	Gas in the intestines or abdomen
Mydriatic	A drug that causes dilation of the pupil of the eye
Myotic	Also spelled "miotc;" an agent that causes the pupil to contract
Narcotic	A drug that produces sleep or stupor and relieves pain
Neoplasm	An abnormal new growth; a tumour

Short Dictionary of Terms, continued

Term	Definition
Nervine	A medicine which calms the nerves; a nervous remedy or tonic
Nevus	A mole or birth mark
Nutrient	A drug which affects the body's nutritive or metabolic processes; something nourishing
Oxytocic	A medicine which accelerates childbirth
Paresis	Partial paralysis
Parotitis	Inflammation of the parotid gland, most often caused by mumps
Parturition	The process of giving birth to a child
Pediculi	Singular "pediculus;" lice
Pertussis	Whooping cough
Phlebitis	Inflammation of a vein
Photophobia	Abnormal aversion to or inability to tolerate light

Short Dictionary of Terms, continued

Term	Definition
Phthisis	A wasting disease, most often referring to pulmonary tuberculosis
Piles	Hemorrhoids
Pleurisy	Inflammation of the pleura (the layer of tissue protecting the lungs), causing pain while breathing
Podagra	Pain in the big toe caused by gout
Porriqo	Ringworm or other scalp disease
Psoriasis	A skin disease causing scaly red patches on the extensor surfaces (knees, elbows, trunk, etc.) of the body
Ptosis	Drooping of the eyelid or the displacement of an organ or body part from its normal position
Ptyalagogue	A medicine that increases saliva production (see also sialagogue)
Ptyalism	Excessive salivation
Puerperium	The approximately six week period after childbirth in which the mother's body returns to a non-pregnant state; also called the confinement period or lying-in period

Short Dictionary of Terms, continued

Term	Definition
Purgative	A laxative; a medicine causing the bowels to empty
Purpura	A disease which causes purple patches on the skin and mucous membranes
Pustulant	An agent which causes the formation of pustules (boils)
Quinsy	Tonsillitis; inflammation of the throat
Rachitis	Inflammation of the vertebral column; often meant the same as "rickets"
Refrigerant	A remedy which cools, relieving fever and thirst
Resolvent	An agent which causes or promotes resolution or dissipation of a pathologic (diseased, abnormal) growth
Restorative	A remedy that helps to promote the restoration of health, vigour, or consciousness
Rheumatism	Inflammation and pain of connective tissues of the body, especially muscles and joints; rheumatoid arthritis
Rickets	A Vitamin D deficiency disease in children in which the bones are soft and weak, so they become bent

Short Dictionary of Terms, continued

Term	Definition
Rubefacient	An agent that reddens the skin
Rubeola	Measles; sometimes refers to rubella
Scabies	A contagious skin disease characterized by itching and caused by the itch mite burrowing under the skin
Sciatica	Painful inflammation of the sciatic nerve, which begins at the base of the spine down the leg
Scorbutus	Scurvy; Vitamin C deficiency
Scrofula	Tuberculosis of the lymphatic glands; sometimes of the bones and joint surfaces
Septicemia	Septic infection; sepsis. Poisoning of the blood by bacteria and/or their toxins.
Sialagogue	A medicine which promotes the production of saliva
Somnambulism	Sleepwalking
Somnolence	Drowsiness
Soporific	A medicine which causes sleep

Short Dictionary of Terms, continued

Term	Definition
Sternutatory	An agent that causes sneezing
Stomachic	A medicine which promotes the functioning of the stomach
Strabismus	Deviation of the eye; crossed eyes
Strophulus	Tooth rash or gum rash (in infants)
Styptic	A substance that stops bleeding (see also "astringent")
Sudorific	An agent that causes sweating (see also "diaphoretic")
Suppuration	The formation of pus
Syncope	Swooning, fainting, loss of consciousness caused by a fall in blood pressure
Tenesmus	Frequent urge to empty bowels or urinate, can involve straining and pain
Teniafuge	A medicine that expels tapeworms
Tetter	Popular name for many different skin diseases

Short Dictionary of Terms, continued

Term	Definition
Tinea	Ringworm
Tonic	A medicine that restores "normal tone" to tissue; restores and invigorates
Torticollis	A twisted neck, also called "wryneck." The head becomes turned to one side and there are often painful muscle spasms
Trismus	Lockjaw, often from tetanus. The muscles become so tight that the mouth cannot open
Tympanites	Also called "tympany;" gas in or around the intestines causing the abdomen to distend/swell
Typhlitis	Inflammation of the cecum (the small pouch where the large and small intestines meet); term was once used to refer to what is now called "appendicitis"
Ulcus	Latin for "ulcer"
Uremia	Elements of urine present in the blood; causes headache, nausea, vomiting, convulsions, coma, dim vision, vertigo, etc.
Urticaria	Hives
Varicella	Chicken pox

Short Dictionary of Terms, continued

Term	Definition
Varicosis	Varicose veins
Variola	Smallpox
Vaso-constrictor	A drug which causes the blood vessels to constrict
Vaso-dilator	A drug which causes the blood vessels to dilate
Vermicide	A medicine which destroys intestinal parasites (worms). See also "anthelmintic"
Vesicant	A drug or agent which causes blisters
Wen	A boil or sebaceous (fluid-filled) cyst

Medical Vocabulary List

This medical vocabulary list is comprised of a set of generalized medical terms which should be able to cover the medical artifacts in your collections. Use this list as a form of controlled vocabulary for cataloguing and classifying your artifacts, and as a guide to spelling, terminology, etc. Feel free to add this list of terms to an existing authority file in a classification, subjects, or search terms field in your database. Terms may be added to it depending on the needs of your collections, but this should provide you with a good starting point. For more complex medical terminologies (see page 12 of this document for a discussion of why both specific and general medical terms should be used in tandem), refer to the National Library of Medicine's MeSH vocabulary (page 7 of this document).

This list is based on the general medical classifications used by the Museum of Health Care at Kingston and the Medical Artifact Collection at Western University.

Anesthesia	Archival, Prescription
Anesthesiology	Archival, Publication
Animal Remains	Archival, Textbook
Antibiotic	Art Therapy
Antiseptic	Arteries
Anus	Aspiration
Appendix	Bandages
Archival	Basic Science
Archival, Certificate of Birth	Basic Science, Anatomy
Archival, Certificate of Death	Basic Science, Bacteriology
Archival, Manual	Basic Science, Chemistry
Archival, Mental Health	Basic Science, Pathology
Archival, Pamphlet	Basic Science, Physiology
Archival, Patient Records	Basin
Archival, Pharmacy	Bedpan

Medical Vocabulary List, continued

Birth Control	Denture, Full
Bladder	Denture, Partial
Blood Pressure	Dentures
Bloodletting	Dermatology
Bones	Diabetes
Braille	Diagnosis
Brain	Diagnosis, Clinical Laboratory
Canadian Red Cross	Diagnosis, General
Cancer	Diagnostic Radiology
Cane	Dialysis
Cannabis	Diaphragm
Cannabis, Medicinal	Dictionaries, Medical
Cardiology	Diets
Cardiovascular	Diseases
Chamber Pot	Diseases, Infectious
Chemistry	Diseases, Tropical
Chinese Medicine	Disinfection
Clothing, Medical	Ears
Contact Lenses	Electricity
Contraception	Electroconvulsive Therapy
COVID-19	Electrotherapy
Cranium	Emergency
Deaf	Emergency Medicine
Death	Endocrinology
Dental	Epidemics
Dental Cleansers	Equipment and Supplies
Dental Instruments	Eye Protection
Dental Prosthesis	Eyeglasses
Dental Protection	Eyeglasses, Corrective
Denture Models	Eyes

Medical Vocabulary List, continued

Fallopian Tubes	Hydrotherapy
Family Medicine	Hygiene
Female Reproductive System	Immunology
Feminine Hygiene	Indigenous Medicine
Feminine Hygiene Product	Infant Food
First Aid	Infant Nutrition
Food, Fortified	Infection
Footwear, Orthopedic	Infection Control
Footwear, Surgical	Infectious Diseases
Formularies	Injection
Foundation Garment	Instrumentation, Amputation
Gall Bladder	Instrumentation, Basic Science
Gastroenterology	Instrumentation, Dialysis
Genetics	Instrumentation, Mental Health
Geriatrics	Instrumentation, Neurology
Glands	Instrumentation, Obstetrics
Gynecology	Instrumentation, Surgery
Hair Care	Insulin
Hazardous Materials	Intestine, Large
Hearing	Intestine, Small
Hearing Aids	Joints
Hearing Loss	Kidneys
Heart	Laxative
Hematology	Liver
Home Health Care	Lungs
Homeopathy	Lymph Nodes
Hospital	Magnifying Glass
Hospital Administration	Male Reproductive System
Human Remains	Massage
Humane Restraint	Medical Education

Medical Vocabulary List, continued

Medical Instruments	Nursing Education
Medical Training	Nursing Textbook
Menstruation	Nursing Uniform
Mental Health	Nursing Uniform Accessories
Mental Health, Diagnosis	Nursing Uniform, Cap
Mental Health, Education	Nursing Uniform, Cape
Mental Health, Hospital	Nursing Uniform, Dress
Mental Health, Psychiatry	Nursing Uniform, Footwear
Mental Health, Psychology	Nursing Uniform, Stockings
Microscopes	Nursing, Anatomy
Midwifery	Nutrition
Military Medicine	Obstetrics
Military Medicine, Dental	Occupational Therapy
Military Medicine, Home Front	Oncology
Military Medicine, Hospital	Ophthalmology
Military Medicine, Surgical	Opiates
Military Medicine, War Front	Optometry
Model, Anatomical	Oral Contraception
Morphine	Oral Hygiene
Motion Sickness	Orthopedics
Mouth	Orthotic Devices
Muscles	Otolaryngology
Nausea	Ovaries
Neonatal	Oxygen
Nephrology	Palliative Care
Nerves	Pancreas
Neurology	Pandemics
Neuroradiology	Patent Medicine
Numismatics	Pathology
Nursing	Patient Care

Medical Vocabulary List, continued

Pediatrics	Respirology
Penicillin	Restraint
Penis	Rheumatology
Percussion	Sanatorium
Personal Care	Sanitarium
Pharmacy	Sanitation
Phlebotomy	Sanitizer
Physical Examination	Sexual Health
Physiology	Sexually Transmitted Infections
Podiatry	Skeleton
Post Mortem	Skull
Pregnancy	Smoking
Prescription	Spinal Cord
Preventative Safety	Sports Safety
Proctology	St. John Ambulance
Prostate	Sterilization
Prosthetics	Stethoscope
Protective Devices	Stomach
Psychiatry	Supplies, Dental
Psychology	Supplies, Disposable Medical
Public Health	Supplies, Hospital
Quackery	Supplies, Laboratory
Radiology	Supplies, Medical
Radiotherapy	Surgery
Rectum	Surgery, Cardiac
Red Cross	Surgery, Clothing
Reflexes	Surgery, Dental
Refrigeration	Surgery, Eye
Rehabilitation	Surgery, General
Religious Faith & Healing	Surgery, Neurosurgery

Medical Vocabulary List, continued

Surgery, Orthopedic	Urethra
Surgery, Plastic	Urinal
Surgery, Thoracic	Urinalysis
Syphilis	Urine Testing
Syringe	Urology
System, Circulatory	Uterus
System, Digestive	Vaccination
System, Endocrine	Vagina
System, Integumentary	Vas Deferens
System, Lymphatic	Veins
System, Musculoskeletal	Veterinary
System, Nervous	Victorian Order of Nurses
System, Reproductive	Vision
System, Respiratory	Vision Testing
System, Urinary	Vomiting
Teeth	Wound Dressing
Temperature	Wound Healing
Testicles	X-Rays
Testing	
Therapeutics	
Throat	
Toiletries	
Tonsils	
Tooth Powder	
Toothpaste	
Treatment	
Treatment, General	
Treatment, Mental Health	
Truss	
Tuberculosis	

Pharmacy Classifications List

This Pharmacy Classifications List is organized into sections based on the classification system described on pages 16 to 19 of this document. Like the Medical Vocabulary List and the Short Dictionary of Terms, it is by no means exhaustive, but should provide a good starting point for a small pharmacy collection. Remember to classify things first as simply “Pharmacy,” and then to preface each term with “Pharmacy” to ensure specificity (ex. Pharmacy, Pills).

1. Type

SUBSTANCE	METHOD / MANUFACTURE
Capsules Drops Implant Inhaler Injection Liquid Lozenge Ointment Patch Pills Powder Suppository Syrup Tablets	Apothecary Compounded Dispensed Home Remedy Manufactured Patent Medicine Raw Ingredient OTHER Homeopathic Non-prescription Prescription Topical

Pharmacy Classifications List, continued

2. Body Systems/Parts

SYSTEMS	Brain
Circulatory System	Bronchi
Digestive System	Bronchioles
Endocrine System	Capillaries
Integumentary System	Cerebellum
Lymphatic System	Cerebrum
Muscular System	Cervix
Nervous System	Clitoris
Reproductive System	Cochlea
Respiratory System	Cornea
Skeletal System	Diaphragm
Urinary System	Diencephalon
General	Eardrum
Holistic	Ears
PARTS	Epididymis
Adrenal Glands	Esophagus
Anus	Eyes
Appendix	Fallopian Tubes
Arteries	Gallbladder
Bladder	Heart
Bone Marrow	Hypothalamus
Bones	Inner Ear
	Interstitium

Pharmacy Classifications List, continued

2. Body Systems/Parts

Iris	Pancreas
Joints	Parathyroid Glands
Kidneys	Penis
Large Intestine	Pharynx
Larynx	Pharynx
Lens	Pineal Gland
Ligaments	Pituitary Gland
Lips	Pons
Liver	Prostate
Lungs	Rectum
Lymph Node	Retina
Lymphatic Vessel	Salivary Glands
Mammary Glands	Scrotum
Medulla Oblongata	Skin
Mesentery	Small Intestine
Midbrain	Spinal Cord
Middle Ear	Spleen
Mouth	Stomach
Nerves	Teeth
Nose	Tendons
Ossicles	Testicles
Outer Ear	Thalamus
Ovaries	Thymus

Pharmacy Classifications List, continued

2. Body Systems/Parts

Thyroid Gland Tissue Tongue Tonsils Trachea Ureters Urethra Uterus Vagina Vas deferens Veins Vulva	
---	--

3a. Illnesses and Symptoms: Medical Terms
General Terms

3b. Illnesses and Symptoms:

Follow the chart below to find terms for illnesses and symptoms— both medical and general. These are not in alphabetical order, so be sure to refer to the Short Dictionary of Terms on page 23! This is not an exhaustive list, and does not include specific diseases, so you may want to add your own terms as well. Not all terms will have corresponding general or medical entries.

On the left are the proper (or, sometimes, outdated or simply more complex) medical terms, and on the right are the corresponding general terms which cover the most general meaning of the terms on the left. This means that the medical terms might differ from each other in meaning. For example, “emetic” and “antiemetic” would both correspond to the general term “vomiting,” though one means to induce vomiting and the other means to prevent it. Some medical terms might also fit more than one general term. This is part of the reason both sets of terms should be used. Sometimes, the general term also appears as a medical term. Only list it once in your classifications.

Pharmacy Classifications List, continued3a. Illnesses and Symptoms: Medical Terms
General Terms

3b. Illnesses and Symptoms:

Alterant Alterative Nutrient Restorative Tonic	Tonic
Analgesic Anodyne Narcotic Opiate	Pain Relief
Anthelmintic Vermicide	Parasites
Antacid	Heartburn
Antiemetic Emetic	Vomiting
Antiperiodic	Recurring Disease
Antiphlogistic Demulcent	Inflammation

Pharmacy Classifications List, continued

3a. Illnesses and Symptoms: Medical Terms
General Terms

3b. Illnesses and Symptoms:

Antipyretic Antiphlogistic Refrigerant	Fever
Antiseptic Germicide	Infection
Antispasmodic	Spasms
Aperient Cathartic Hydragogue Laxative Purgative	Laxative
Astringent Hemostatic Styptic	Bleeding
Carminative	Flatulence

Pharmacy Classifications List, continued3a. Illnesses and Symptoms: Medical Terms
General Terms

3b. Illnesses and Symptoms:

Caustic Escharotic	Caustic
Cholagogue	Bile
Counter-irritant Irritant Demulcent	Irritation
Depilatory	Hair
Diaphoretic Sudorific	Sweat
Diuretic	Urination
Ecbolic Oxytocic	Childbirth
Emmenagogue	Menstruation

Pharmacy Classifications List, continued

3a. Illnesses and Symptoms: Medical Terms
General Terms

3b. Illnesses and Symptoms:

Errhine Sternutatory	Sneezing
Expectorant	Mucus
Hypnotic Narcotic Soporific	Sleep
Mydriotic Myotic	Pupil
Ptyalagogue Sialagogue	Saliva
Stomachic Antacid	Digestion
Vaso-constrictor Vaso-dilator	Blood Pressure

A Word About Online Databases

When posting your artifacts online, consider what information you may or may not want to share with the public. There are many details that are necessary to note in a museum's internal database that should not be made public knowledge. This is especially true when it comes to medical and pharmaceutical objects and documents. Consult the checklist below to determine what information you want to publish—or leave out—of your public-facing online database.

1. **Ingredients – Safety and Legality:** The ingredients of pharmaceutical artifacts should always be listed in the internal museum database for research, safety, and legal purposes, but should only be published on the internet with care and caution. Many pharmaceutical artifacts contain illegal substances which should not be advertised to the general public, as well as substances potentially dangerous to human health. To prevent theft, keep this information out of the public eye.
2. **Location:** The location of pharmaceutical and medical artifacts within your collection is also necessary for internal museum purposes, but should be left out of published online databases to prevent theft.
3. **Sensitive Information:** Medical and pharmaceutical artifacts may also contain sensitive or privacy restricted information, such as patient records, names, etc. Consult your province's health information privacy legislation to determine what may be published and what must remain restricted from public view.

On the PastPerfect 5 “PastPerfect Online” feature under “Select Data Fields to Include in Web Publication,” you can choose which fields from your internal database to include, or not include, online.

Citations and Further Reading

Further Reading

Goldstein, Daniel A. The Historical Apothecary Compendium. Atglen, Pennsylvania: Schiffer Publishing Co., 2015.

This book is an excellent resource for finding out the different historical uses for various ingredients commonly listed on and included in pharmaceutical artifacts.

Merck's 1899 Manual. New York: Merck & Co., 1899.

<https://archive.org/details/merks1899manual0000ounse/mode/2up>.

This book contains information about medicines and dosages used for a variety of different diseases, and has appeared in many different editions accessible on the Internet Archive.

National Library of Medicine. "Medical Subject Headings." Last modified January 22, 2024. <https://www.nlm.nih.gov/mesh/meshhome.html>.

Further Reading on Medical Nomenclature and Indigenous Ways of Knowing

Stettinger Lee, Sarah. "Indigenizing Knowledge Organization Systems: Incorporating Indigenous Knowledges in Libraries." Brochure. Indigenous Library and Information Studies in a Canadian Context. <https://indigenoullis.ca/an-online-toolkit-for-indigenizing-controlled-vocabulary-and-knowledge-organization-in-library-catalogs/>.

University of Alberta Library. "Medical Terminology." First Nations, Métis, Inuit (FNMI) Health Resources. Last modified February 2, 2024. <https://guides.library.ualberta.ca/c.php?g=392286&p=5079937>.

The University of British Columbia Library. "Indigenous Knowledge Organization." Indigenous Librarianship. Last modified October 19, 2023. <https://guides.library.ubc.ca/Indiglibrarianship/knowledgeorganizations>.

University of Ottawa Library. "Indigenous Terminology." Indigenous Health. Last modified November 15, 2023. <https://uottawa.libguides.com/c.php?g=725495&p=5197493>.

Citations

Canadian Heritage. “Data Entry: Preventing Errors in New Data.” In Museum Collections Documentation and Data Cleaning. Online Course by the Canadian Conservation Institute. Accessed February 13, 2024.

Canva Magic Media. “Antique Pharmacy Bottles - Stained Glass.” Created January 2024.

Canadian Heritage Information Network. “Vocabulary (data value standards).” CHIN Guide to Museum Standards. Last modified March 3, 2022.

Dorland, W. A. Newman. The American Illustrated Medical Dictionary. Philadelphia and London: W. B. Saunders Company, 1947.

National Library of Medicine. “Cataloging with Medical Subject Headings (MeSH).” September 29, 2023. https://www.nlm.nih.gov/oet/ed/mesh/2023/9-29_mesh-cataloging_transcript.pdf.

This document was written as part of the Collections Care for Historical Pharmaceutical Collections Resource Package created and hosted by the Museum of Health Care at Kingston and

Funded by the
Government
of Canada

Canada 