

SWOG Guide for Replacing Problematic Terms: Sample Selection of Terms

Term to avoid	What to use instead	Rationale
dose de-escalation	lowering the dose of a medicine over time to find the right dose for a patient or group of patients	“De-escalation” is a technical term, and it has other meanings — notably, to calm someone down to help prevent aggressive or violent behavior.
geriatric adults	older adults <ul style="list-style-type: none">It’s also helpful to give a specific age range.	“Geriatric” can imply frailty and weakness, and many older adults don’t consider themselves geriatric.
minorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Name specific groups whenever possible.	“Minority” can inadvertently imply “less important.” It’s also not always accurate. In some cases, groups that were historically “minorities” no longer are.
patient failed treatment	the treatment didn’t work	“The treatment didn’t work” avoids implying the patient is to blame or “failed” in some way.
progression	when the cancer gets worse (or when the cancer grows or spreads)	“Progression” has a positive connotation in non-medical terms, making it particularly confusing as a medical term.
salvage therapy	treatment people get when other treatments didn’t work	“Salvage” can bring to mind damaged property or wreckage (think “salvage yard.”)
subject	patient or person	“Subject” sounds de-humanizing, as if someone is simply being experimented on. “Patient” or “person” humanizes them.