

Building a Culture of Respect at the ASTRO Annual Meeting: Language is Action

Historically, health care language has not consistently been centered on patient sensitivity. Insensitive health care language can have the inadvertent consequence of alienating and dehumanizing patients. It is increasingly recognized that “words matter” and can shape and reflect our behavior, and appropriate language is imperative to ensure that our patients and their families are treated with respect and dignity. Adopting language of respect extends also to the treatment of our colleagues. Recent studies have uncovered inconsistencies in the use of formal titles in the introduction of speakers at national and international conferences.

With an expanding audience due to increasing use of virtual technology and social media, and in order to foster a respectful, inclusive and bias-free culture (<https://www.astro.org/About-ASTRO/diversity-and-inclusion>), ASTRO and its 2021 President pledge to raise awareness, provide guidance and standardize appropriate language use at the ASTRO Annual Meeting. As such, the following directives, which will be continually evaluated, updated and modified, have been developed for participants of the ASTRO Annual Meeting during all ASTRO sessions and presentations:

- 1) When describing research findings, or presenting the case of a patient, avoid language that:
 - (i) Imply patients are responsible for their condition or outcome
Instead of: “20% of patients failed treatment”
Appropriate language: “20% of patients had tumors that did not respond to treatment”
Instead of: “20% of patients progressed”
Appropriate language: “The tumors progressed in 20% of patients”
 - (ii) Dehumanize patients
Instead of: “A 42 year-old paraplegic”
Appropriate language: “A 42 year-old patient with paraplegia”
 - (iii) Stigmatize patients
Instead of: “Substance abuser”
Appropriate language: “Patient with a history of substance use disorder”

- 2) When introducing or addressing speakers:
 - (i) Speakers who have a doctoral degree (e.g., MD, PhD, ScD, DMD, PharmD) should be introduced and addressed as Dr. Full Name or Dr. Last Name.
 - (ii) All other speakers should be introduced as Mr./Ms./Mx. Full Name or Mr./Ms./Mx. Last Name
 - (iii) Formal titles should be used throughout the entire session, including Q&A, in a consistent manner, regardless of the level of familiarity with each other
 - (iv) Whenever possible, we strongly encourage session, panel or workshop chairs, moderators and all other speakers, to confirm ahead of time the correct pronunciation of the speakers’ names, and their gender pronouns.
 - a. Visit <https://www.mypronouns.org/how> for more information on pronouns.
 - b. We recommend using <https://namedrop.io/> as a tool to collect correct name pronunciation.

ASTRO Leadership greatly appreciates the valuable contributions from all ASTRO Annual Meeting Faculty members, and their commitment to support a culture of respectful, collegial and inclusive interactions.