

“Word Association”—A Snap Shot of What Is in the Mind

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We would like to share our experiences with a technique called “word association” that we used during a recent registry meeting of the Indian Society of Vascular and Interventional Radiology held at Chandigarh in August 2015. “Word association” is the connection and production of another word in response to a given word, done spontaneously as a game, creative technique, or in a psychiatric evaluation.^{1,2}

Each delegate of the conference was given a small booklet containing three pages, each page containing one word each and an empty box to fill the associated word. Consent was obtained from every participant. The words mentioned were “Highway,” “Interventional Radiology,” and “Embolisation.” Each page contained a single word to prevent a given word from being a hint as the answer for another given word. The booklet was distributed just before a talk given by one of the authors titled “Complications in embolisation procedures - prevalence and the spectrum.”

The audience included expert interventional radiologists, general radiologists, and radiology postgraduate students. The candidates were asked to enter a word which they would remember immediately as an associated word. They were requested to fill up the booklet and return immediately. The filled booklets were collected and at the end of the talk, and a quick tabulated display of the responses for the third word “Embolisation” was done (► **Table 1**).

There was a very good response from the delegates, with almost everyone voluntarily filling the booklet, totaling 58 responses. The first word “Highway” was like a trial, where 32 different words were mentioned, most common being “Speed,” “Accident,” and “Safety.” The second word was representing the subspecialty “Interventional Radiology,” where the commonest word was “catheter” and there were a lot of responses such as “My passion” and “Interesting.” The commonest response word for “Embolisation” was “To stop bleed.” The spectrum of the word responses was varied representing a wide heterogeneity in the thinking of different individuals.

This initial attempt in a theme-based medical conference was found to be very quick and user-friendly. The scope of this

Table 1 List of word association responses for the third word “Embolisation”

Word association for “Embolisation”	Number of responses
Stoppage/cessation of bleed	7
Coil	5
Life saving	5
PVA (polyvinyl alcohol)	3
AVM (arteriovenous malformation)	2
Glue	2
Particle	2
Bleeder	2
Gelfoam	2
Thrombosis	2
Home-made ethyl alcohol	1
Leakage closure	1
Preparation & Hardware	1
Risky	1
Vessel cast	1
Bleed	1
Cure	1
Dreadful	1
Expandability of artery	1
Flow	1
Indication	1
Material	1
Non-target embolisation	1
Onyx	1
Safe closure	1

(Continued)

Table 1 (Continued)

Word association for "Embolisation"	Number of responses
Therapy	1
Treatment	1
Tumour	1
TACE	1
"Again that boring"	1
"Dr. SS" (a senior interventional radiologist in India)	1
Glue and pseudoaneurysm	1
Heart rate	1
High level plumbing	1
Total	58

may be extended in similar events in the future. One could even consider doing a posttest after the presentation with same words to see any change in thinking.

We found that it was easy to get the audience to respond to a "word association test" in a conference. After assessing the responses, we got a good idea of the spectrum and frequency of associated words related to the topic of the talk. This gave us a snapshot of what was in the minds of the delegates, who decided to attend the talk³ and helped the speaker to connect directly with the audience as he stressed on various aspects of his talk to get his message across.

References

- 1 Wikipedia. Available at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Word_Association. Accessed August 23, 2015
- 2 Dictionary.com's 21st Century Lexicon. Available at <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/word-association>. Accessed August 23, 2015
- 3 Iverson GL, Franzen MD, Lovell MR. Normative comparisons for the controlled oral word association test following acute traumatic brain injury. *Clin Neuropsychol* 1999;13(4):437-441