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## Medical Subject Headings (MeSH)

When a physician has observed (or thinks he has observed) a fact, or has evolved from his inner consciousness a theory which he wishes to examine by the light of the medical literature, he is often very much at a loss to know how to begin, even if he has a large library accessible for the purpose.

The information he desires may be in the volume next to his hand, but how is he to know that? And even when the usual subject-catalogue is placed before him he finds it very difficult to use it, especially when, as is often the case, he has by no means a well defined idea as to what it is he wishes to look for. Upon the title page of the Washington City Directory is printed the following aphorism, "To find a name you must know how to spell it." This has a very extensive application in medical bibliography. To find accounts similar to your own rare case you must know what your own case is.

*John Shaw Billings (1881)*

**D**URING the late 1990s, a worker at the San Francisco Department of Public Health received an e-mail asking whether there were any data linking the use of cell phones to accidents caused by distracted drivers. The City's Board of Supervisors was considering a regulation to ban the use of car and cell phones while driving. Using a Web-based source of MeSH information, "car phones" was typed in, but none of the MeSH terms that came up were appropriate. Similarly, neither "cell phones" nor "phones" seemed related to a useful MeSH term. But typing in "telephones" showed that TELEPHONE is a MeSH term. [*Note:* At the time, CELLULAR PHONE (introduced in 2003) was not yet a