

Medical glossary of terms in *Brother, I'm Dying* by Edwidge Danticat

(number in parentheses is the first page in the book where the term appears)

- (3) PULMONOLOGIST: a doctor who specializes in problems of lung structure and function
- (3) PULMONARY FIBROSIS: chronic irritation inside the lungs that gradually gets worse causing irreversible stiffening of tissues that are normally very thin and flexible. The main symptom is frequent shortness of breath; there is no cure except a lung transplant.
- (5) CHRONIC PSORIASIS: a long-lasting skin irritation that causes skin thickening, whitening, and peeling.
- (5) ECZEMA: recurrent skin irritation with various triggers that can itching, oozing, blisters.
- (5) HERBALIST: someone who knows and advises the use of herbs for medical remedies.
- (6) IRIDOLOGY: medical study of the *iris* (the colored circular part of center of the outer eye surface).
- (10) CODEINE: a narcotic commonly used for pain relief and cough suppression.
- (11) PREDNISON: a synthetic oral steroid medicine (similar to cortisone made in the body) that is a powerful “quieter” of immune system overreactions in the body.
- (37) LARYNX: the upper part of the windpipe containing the vocal cords, where air passes through to create vibrations we use for voice sounds.
- (37) TUMOR: a new growth of tissue (*tumor* is Latin for “swelling”) in which cell growth is not controlled and often gets worse. Not all tumors are cancers. Actual tissue type is learned by taking a living tissue sample, known as a *biopsy*.
- (38) LARYNGEAL CANCER: a cancerous tumor growing in the larynx. The tumor cells invade, spread, and multiply in an illness that is fatal if left untreated. It changes one’s voice-- the first hint of this cancer in Uncle Joseph appears on p. 35
- (39) RADICAL LARYNGECTOMY: an old surgical term for removal of the larynx and surrounding tissues to remove cancer. The patient loses all voice function, and must breathe through an opening, about the size of a nickel, made in the base of the neck.
- (42) TRACHEOTOMY: a surgical incision of the trachea (windpipe) to allow a new pathway for breathing. This may be done in a sudden emergency to save a life, or as part of careful reconstruction of the area during a planned operation. The long-term opening that results is called a tracheostomy.
- (63) CAVE NECK: a sunken part around a healed surgical opening at the base of the neck, resulting from tracheotomy.
- (68) LIVER SPOT: a freckle-like blemish, common on the hands and face. A liver spot is flat, painless, red-to-brown in color. It is a result of aging and sun exposure.
- (99) TUBERCULOSIS: a slow-growing infection of the lungs’ delicate internal tissues, caused by a member of the genus *Mycobacterium*. It is treatable with oral medicines taken every day for 9 months.
- (130) VOICE BOX: a layman’s term for “larynx.” Also, an electrical device (hand-held to the side of the neck) that can help create artificial voice sounds after surgical removal of the larynx.
- (116) LOW-LYING PLACENTA: the *placenta* is the life-giving organ (its name is Latin for a “flat cake”) that joins the mother and her fetus inside the uterus during pregnancy. It is situated along the internal surface of the uterus, with a location that can vary throughout pregnancy. On rare occasions the *low-lying placenta* covers the birth canal before the baby can be delivered. This is called *placenta previa*, which is an obstetric emergency threatening both mother and child.
- (239) HYPOGLYCEMIC: abnormally low sugar in the blood, potentially fatal if not corrected.
- (247) PANCREATITIS: acute or chronic inflammation of the pancreas, a complex secretory digestive organ situated behind the stomach. In acute pancreatitis, the organ begins digesting itself, most commonly caused by heavy alcohol overuse. Both acute and chronic conditions can be very painful in the abdomen and back, requiring strong pain relievers.
- (253) ANGEL KISSES: dilated clusters of tiny blood vessels that are visible and close to the skin surface of the eyelids. They often fade after a baby is born and do not cause problems.