

## **KISWAHILI – MEDICALLY**

By: Simon M. Kamau, School of Health Sciences, University of Kabianga, Formerly Nurse Manager Moi Teaching & Referral Hospital Eldoret. Kenya

Email: [smacharia@kabianga.ac.ke](mailto:smacharia@kabianga.ac.ke)

**Adapted from the original attempt by Moi-Indiana University Partnership**

Objective: Exchange programme and those students who have difficulty in their communicating in Kiswahili in the clinical areas

Here is a beginning list of words you might find helpful as you work. Kiswahili is NOT a language that one can begin to speak readily since nouns are divided into eight classes, which do not always make sense to the English speaker. Prepositions, verbs, adjectives, etc. must agree with the class of the noun being modified – AND it gets worse before things fall into place (IF they ever do!).

Much more than language is involved: as examples - the honing of the power of observation, the sniffing out of the unusual, and the overriding of pattern recognition by the worry that the information from the patient does not all fit the initial hypothesis generated. SHENG acronym for Kiswahili English has several genre, but is spoken mainly by the youth. As much as possible SHENG have been avoided here but do not be surprised if you come across it, learn some bit of it.

If you ask a question to a patient, you may find it difficult to understand his or her answer. Still, knowing a few words may help you to understand the jist of the conversation occurring at bedside. Generally, if a patient or Kenyan counterpart is referring to a certain person within the hospital, the following holds true:

“Sisters” - nurses

“Nursing officers” - male nurses

“Matron” - head nurse

“Medical Officer” (MO) - post intern physician assigned to the District Hospital

“Clinical Officer” (CO) - similar to a physician assistant

“Intern” - interns