**Word for Word**

**Suggestive, suspected, or suspicious?**

In medicine, making inferences and drawing conclusions from observations is part of the job. When communicating these inferences and conclusions, it is important to be clear when they are based on evidence but are not yet established facts. Words we use to communicate this uncertainty include suggestive, suspected, and suspicious.

*Suspicious* describes the sense (but not certainty) that an observation or result is linked to a problem, diagnosis, or outcome. It can also describe something that arouses suspicion.

**Examples**
We were suspicious that the villagers’ symptoms were caused by schistosomiasis.
The CT scan showed a suspicious lesion but was inadequate to confirm the diagnosis.

*Suggestive* describes something that implies or evokes. While a lesion or finding can be suspicious, the test that identified the lesion or finding is suggestive.

**Examples**
Incorrect: The chest x-ray was suspicious for sarcoidosis.
Correct: The chest x-ray was suggestive of sarcoidosis.

Because an explanation that is thought (but not known) to underlie a problem may be suspected, suspect or suspected is often used interchangeably with suspicious. However, it is considered incorrect to say a lesion is suspect;
suspicious is the correct term. As a verb, to suspect is to infer a cause, but again with a sense of uncertainty.

**Examples**
The suspected disease-causing mutations were screened for frequency of occurrence.
We suspect that the lesion is a squamous cell carcinoma, but a biopsy is needed to confirm it.

**Bibliography**

--Kathryn Hale

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