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**A Short Look at Rosa's Law and What it Changes**

By

Clinton S. Thomas, Th.D.

As any student of the English language can tell you, the meanings of words change with time. Not only does the meaning of words change, but also new words are developed almost daily. Words like “Risperdal,” and “Prozac” were not around forty years ago. Words like “Reaganomics” or “Obamacare” did not exist before someone coined them or said them in a media production. Naturally as the meaning of words change, it becomes necessary to back away from the use of some words in daily society.

At one time words like “Moron,” “Idiot,” “Deaf and Dumb,” and “Person of unsound mind” were common for the field of disabilities. “Moron” referred to someone who would have a classification of “Mild Mental Retardation,”(Moron, 2013). “Idiot” referred to someone who might have “Profound Mental Retardation” (Idiot, 2013). They were so common they were used in court papers dealing with people. It was not unusual, and they can still be found today in old court documents, for someone with disabilities to be called an “Imbecile”. Consequently, “Imbecile” was the equivalent medically to a person with “Moderate to Severe Mental Retardation” (Imbecile, 2013). Today we would not dream of using these words to describe someone with a disability. If someone says a person is a “Moron,” many of us cringe on the inside.

The result was a negative connotation placed on these words. People did not want to use them and new words were found more appropriate. Medical terminology was changed and instead of words like “Moron,” or “Imbecile,” words like “Mental Retardation,” “MR,” or “Mentally handicapped” began to be used. Those words dominated the field of disabilities from the 1960s until recent times. Then, as usually happens, these words also started to be misused by society. Phrases like, “You’re retarded,” or “You retard,” began to take hold in society and popular culture such as movies (disability, 2013)

The use of mental retardation started to be phased out with Rosa’s Law signed by President Obama. Rosa’s bill introduced in 2009 basically states:

“A bill to change references in Federal law to mental retardation to references to an intellectual disability, and to change references to a mentally retarded individual to references to an individual with an intellectual disability.” (Rosa’s Law, 2013)

In an effort to get away from the negative stereotypes, “Intellectual Disability” replaced “Mental Retardation” and “Individual with an intellectual disability,” replaced “Mentally Retarded”. The process will likely take some time to be completely implemented since medical terminology, psychological terminology and even federal and state standards will have to be modified, but we are already seeing changes in daily life.

Some of the changes in the field you may encounter:

MR (Mental Retardation) = ID (Intellectual Disability) or IID (Individual with ID)

QMRP (Qualified Mental Retardation Professional) = QIDP or QDDP (Qualified Intellectual Disabilities Professional, or Qualified Developmental Disabilities Professional)

ICF/MR (Intermediate Care Facility for People with Mental Retardation) = ICF/ID (Intermediate Care Facility for People with Intellectual Disabilities)

Proper etiquette would indicate that anywhere you might use the words “Mental Retardation” you should replace them with “Intellectual Disability”. As of this writing, the use of terms such as “Profound,” “Severe,” “Mild,” and “Moderate” are still appropriate. A person completing a document about someone would change this:

“John Doe has Mild Mental Retardation and lives with his family at...”

to this:

“John Doe is a person who has a diagnosis of Mild Intellectual Disabilities and lives with his family at...”

While the change is small, the meaning can be huge to people who have lived with the stigma that society has placed on “Mental Retardation.” In the end, though the most important thing that must be remembered is that people with Intellectual Disabilities are ultimately “People”. When we, as a society, move away from the negative views projected on people with Intellectual Disabilities, then we will move forward toward greater acceptance without the need for laws changing terminology.

### The Transition of Words in the field of Disabilities

<b>Word</b>	<b>Time Period Used</b>	<b>Replacement Word</b>
Moron	Early – Mid 1900s	Mild Mental Retardation
Imbecile	Early – Mid 1900s	Moderate –Severe Mental Retardation
Idiot	Early – Mid 1900s	Profound Mental Retardation
Mild Mental Retardation	1960s -2009	Mild Intellectual Disability
Moderate Mental Retardation	1960s-2009	Moderate Intellectual Disability
Severe Mental Retardation	1960s-2009	Severe Intellectual Disability
Profound Mental Retardation	1960s -2009	Profound Intellectual Disability
Moderate Intellectual Disability	2009 – current	?
Severe Intellectual Disability	2009- current	?
Profound Intellectual Disability	2009-current	?

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### **About the author:**

Clinton S. Thomas, Th.D. has been a QIDP (QMRP) in the field of Developmental Disabilities for twenty-five years. He has worked for several providers in Arkansas and Texas. He currently operates My QIDP, a consulting company for ICF/IDs in Texas. Clinton Thomas may be contacted at [myqmrp@myqmrp.com](mailto:myqmrp@myqmrp.com). My QIDP may be viewed through the following web links:

<http://myqidp.com>

<http://myqddp.com>

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