

Nomenclature in medicine; a perspective

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There are several types of nomenclature used in medicine [1-3]. These include eponyms and acronyms. This journal already published two supplements for eponyms in dermatology.

There are, also, several origins for the medical terms. This may include places (e.g. Lyme disease) or food (e.g. Salmon patch) [4].

In this manuscript, We shall present a perspective on medical terminology.

TERMS ORIGINATED FROM ANIMALS

There are several names in medicine which originated from animals names. The genes in humans have been named after some of the animals like mice, drosophila, and hedgehog [5].

An example for a term related to animal is “Elephant man syndrome”.

Sir Frederick Treves first showed Joseph Merrick, (Fig. 1), the famous Elephant Man, to the Pathological Society of London in 1884. A man with gigantic growth, thought to have neurofibromatosis or Proteus syndrome [5,6].

NAMES ORIGINATED FROM FAMOUS CHARACTERS OR STORIES

Researchers who named the medical things are also influenced by public characters or stories. So it is not strange to find some medical terms based on non-medical things.

For example; Kabuki syndrome, which is a congenital disorder with multiple anomalies and intellectual

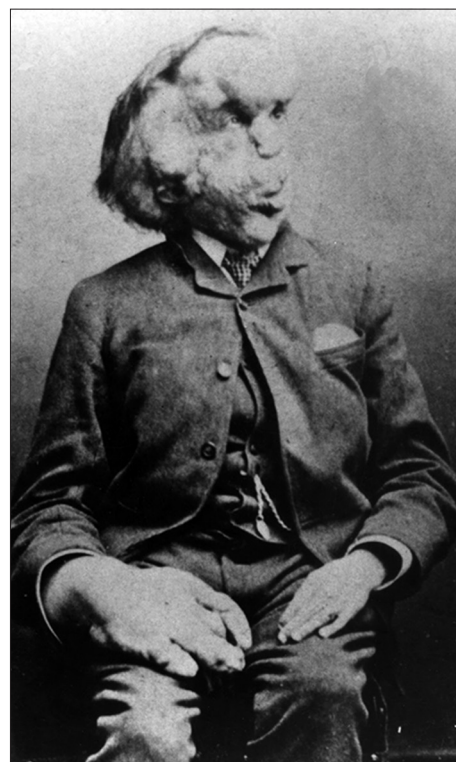


Figure 1: Joseph Carey Merrick (1862-1890).

disability. It is named Kabuki Syndrome because of the facial resemblance to Kabuki actor's mask [7], (Fig. 2). Kabuki is a Japanese traditional theatrical form.

Another example for the above subheading is Rapunzel syndrome, which is a gastric trichobezoar with a tail extending up to the jejunum, ileum, or ileocecal junction [8]. It was first described by Vaughan et al. in 1968. It is named after the eponymous heroine of a German fairy tale written by the Grimm Brothers in 1812 about a 12-year-old princess imprisoned by a witch in a tall tower with neither stairs nor doors for many years; the princess lowered her long hair to the ground

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from her window, allowing a young prince to climb up and rescue her [8] (Fig. 3).

NAMES ORIGINATED FROM A PATIENT'S NAME OR THINGS RELATED TO THE PATIENTS

Rarely a disease may be named after something related to the patients. For example; Ambras syndrome (AS), which is a form of hereditary, generalized hypertrichosis. The Ambras name was given because the family portraits of Gonzales (The first recorded case of AS) were discovered in Ambras castle, (located

in Austria) amongst an art collection started by the archduke Ferdinand II (1529-1595) [9].

Petrus Gonzales (Fig. 4) was born in the Canary Islands in 1556. Out of curiosity, Petrus was brought to France where he was presented as a gift to the nobles. He subsequently produced offspring with similar AS features. Currently, the same paintings of Gonzalez which were in Ambras castle, hang in the Kunsthistorisches museum in Vienna [9].



Figure 2: Two Kabuki actors.

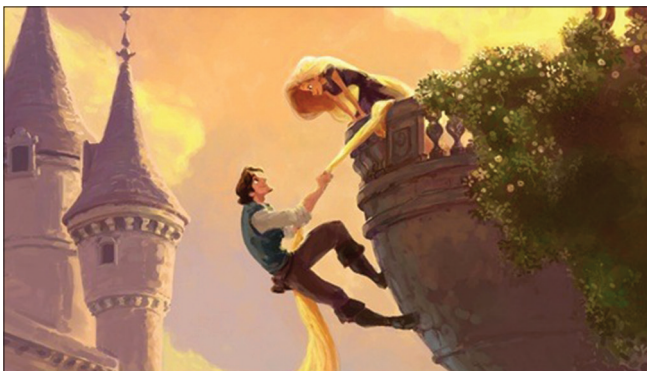


Figure 3: Rapunzel story. From: Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures and New Media Strategies.



Figure 4: Petrus Gonsalvus.



Figure 5: Henry Louis Gehrig (1903-1941).

Table 1: Selected medical terms in which the name of the disease refers to the patient's name

The term	Remarks
Auberger's blood group[10]	This is a type of human blood group in which the Aua antigen is expressed. It is found in 82% of Caucasians. It may be related to the Lutheran antigen system The blood group was named after patient Auberger, who was a 59 year old French woman with oesophageal varices
Christmas disease [11]	Named after Stephen Christmas, the first patient described with this disease in 1952. This term is a synonym for Hemophilia B, which is a blood clotting disorder
Cowden disease [12]	This is a synonym for multiple hamartoma syndrome, which is an autosomal dominant genodermatosis. It was first described in 1963, and named after a young women "Rachel Cowden", and her family in which it was first reported
Galli-Galli disease [13,14]	It is a rare genodermatosis in the spectrum of reticulate hyperpigmentation. It is regarded as an acantholytic variant of Dowling-Degos disease. It was originally reported by Bardach, Gebhart, and Luger in 1982. The term Galli-Galli is an eponym, derived from the family name of the two brothers being originally described with this genodermatosis
Hartnup disorder [15]	This is an autosomal recessive abnormality of renal and gastrointestinal neutral amino acid transport. Clinical features include photosensitive pellagra-like skin rash, cerebellar ataxia and other neurological symptoms. It is named after an English family described in 1956
Lou Gehrig's disease [16]	It is another name for amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, which is a late-onset neurodegenerative disease. Named for Lou Gehrig, [Figure 5]; a famous baseball player. He was diagnosed in 1939 and passed way, at the age of 37 in 1941 due to the disease
Mortimer's disease [17]	This term might be applied to a case of polymorphic cutaneous and systemic sarcoidosis. In 1898, Jonathan Hutchinson (1828-1913), an English physician, coined the term 'Mortimer's Malady'. He coined the term after the name of his patient Mrs. Mortimer who presented with multiple, raised, dusky-red, non-ulcerative and persistent patches, which Hutchinson considered different from tuberculous affliction. Though other eponyms like 'Boeck's sarcoid' have also been in vogue, now the term 'sarcoidosis' is the most accepted for this condition

**Figure 6:** Mary Mallon (1869-1938).

Patients have been immortalized by having their names or initials incorporated; for example, B-K mole syndrome, where the letters B and K refer to the two patients in whom the condition was first described. The same is true of anti-Sm, anti-La, and anti-Ro antibodies, each of which is derived from letters of a patient's name. In table1 [10-17], I listed selected medical terms in which the name of disease refers to the patient's name.

Out of curiosity a reverse might happens, and a person might carry the name of the disease. This is what happened to Mary Mallon (1869-1938), (Fig. 6), who was the first person in the United States identified as an asymptomatic carrier of the pathogen associated with typhoid fever. Mary Mallon was then best known as Typhoid Mary [18].

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