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EPONYMS IN DERMATOLOGY LITERATURE LINKED TO FINLAND

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Finland is a Nordic country situated in the Fennoscandian region of Northern Europe. The population of Finland is currently about 5.4 million [1]. It is developed in many fields, and particularly in education.

This year in the 2013 Reporters Without Borders World Press Freedom Index, and for the third year running, Finland has distinguished itself as the country that most respects media freedom.

There are names in medicine linked to Finland. These names might be after a place or after scientists from Finland [1].

For instance, Aland Island eye disease (AIED), also known as Forsius-Eriksson syndrome, is an X-linked recessive retinal disease characterized by a combination of fundus hypopigmentation, decreased visual acuity, nystagmus, astigmatism, protan color vision defect, progressive myopia, and defective dark adaptation. Electroretinography reveals abnormalities in both photopic and scotopic functions. The gene locus for AIED has been mapped to the pericentromeric region of the X-chromosome [2].

It is named after Henrik Forsius, Finnish ophthalmologist and Aldur Wictor Eriksson, Finnish human geneticist.

It is named Åland Island eye disease because it is reported first and common in Åland which is a group of islands in the Bay of Finland, between Finland and Sweden.

However, one of the commonest eponym linked to Finland mentioned in dermatology literature and the literature of medicine in general is Von Willebrand's disease (vWD). vWD is the most common inherited bleeding disorder. It is characterized by a deficiency in the clotting protein called von Willebrand's Factor; the most common symptom is prolonged bleeding time. The clotting protein Factor VIII may also be involved.

vWD may present with cutaneous bruising and/or bleeding. However the latter may be a manifestation of a hereditary or acquired qualitative or quantitative platelet disorder, disturbance of the vascular or supporting structure, or it may be due to one of several acquired systemic disorders3.

vWD is named after Erik Adolf von Willebrand (1870-1949) [4-7].

Erik Adolf von Willebrand (Fig. 1) is a Finnish internist, born in Vasa; a seaport city located in western Finland and died in, Pernå. He discovered the most common inherited bleeding disorder while studying the genetic traits of a family in the Åland Islands in Finland [4-7].

Von Willebrand published two papers on Physiology and Clinical Management in Treatment with Hot Air. Throughout his lifetime he maintained his interest in the latter form of treatment as well as in metabolic disorders and haematological problems. He focused on blood changes during muscular exercise, metabolism and obesity, as well as carbon dioxide and water exchange through the human skin. Von Willebrand wrote many articles about obesity, gout and diabetes mellitus. He detailed a technique for evaluating ketone bodies in urine in 1912. He wrote about managing diabetes with diet, and he was a pioneer in insulin use. In 1922, von Willebrand wrote about using insulin to treat diabetic coma. He was the author of several hematology articles as well [5].

Von Willebrand remains most famous, however, for his description of vWD. A disease he encountered among the inhabitants of the Åland Islands.

In 1925, he examined a 5-year-old girl with a history of bleeding who had been brought to Helsinki for treatment [5]. The little girl was the ninth of 12 children. Four of her siblings bled to death at an early age. Both of her parents came from families with bleeding disorders.

Von Willebrand was curious to know more, so he traveled to the Åland Islands to study the disease in depth. He mapped the family pedigree and found that 23 of the 66 family members had bleeding problems. Von Willebrand concluded that this was a previously unknown type of hemophilia. Initially, he called the disease „hereditary pseudo-hemophilia" because of the prolonged bleeding time. As he studied the disease more, he came to believe that platelets were involved, so he renamed it „constitution-al thrombopathy". He noted his findings about the family in a 1926 report [5].

In 1994, the Åland Islands issued a postal stamp to honor von Willebrand's work [5].

Figure 1. Erik Adolf von Willebrand (1870-1949). A courtesy of Helsinki University Museum

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