



THE PROBLEM OF SYNONYMS; MULTIPLE SYMMETRIC LIPOMATOSIS, AS AN EXAMPLE

PROBLEM SYNONIMÓW; MULTIPLE SYMMETRIC LIPOMATOSIS, JAKO PRZYKŁAD

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One of the important problems in the medical field is the absent of uniform and standard terminology. This applies to dermatology and to other medical specialties. Many diseases have multiple names, and may be called differently, even in a single country. This may cause confusion among patients, and health care providers.

For researchers looking for a given disease, absent of uniform nomenclature may put strain on them during their studies. This problem, if not corrected, is expected to get worse in the future due to the progressive increase in the amount of medical literature that might be difficult to search for a disease with several names.

In this communication, I will take Multiple Symmetric Lipomatosis (MSL), as an example, for the problem of synonyms.

MSL is a metabolic condition characterized by the growth of fatty masses around the back of the head, neck, upper arms in a very specific pattern, causing a pseudo athletic habitus.

It is described in adults from 30 to 60 years old, and more common in male. Most of the cases are associated with alcoholism [1]. The cause of MSL remains unknown, but abnormalities in lipogenesis induced by catecholamines and mitochondrial DNA have been observed [2].

Multiple Symmetric Lipomatosis, also spelled as multiple symmetrical lipomatosis, is known in medical literature with other names.

These include Benign Symmetric Lipomatosis, Madelung's Disease and Lanois-Bensaude Syndrome.

MSL was first described by Brodie in 1846. Sir Benjamin Collins Brodie (1783-1862), Figure 1, was an English surgeon. After that, Madelung in 1888 and Launois and Bensaude in 1898 characterized the disease [1]. Otto Wilhelm Madelung (1846-1926), Figure 2, was a German surgeon. Pierre-Emile Launois (1856-1914), Figure 3, was a French physician. Raoul Bensaude (1866-1938), Figure 4, was a French physician [3].

One can see easily that searching scientific databases like MEDLINE (www.pubmed.com), with synonyms of this disorder, as a search words, will end up with different number of citations.

Table I, illustrate the discrepancy in the number of citations obtained using each name for this disease.

Hence, the importance of having a uniform and standard terminology in medical field cannot be overemphasized. It remained a goal which is a difficult to achieve.

Many steps might be needed to improve the problem of synonyms. However, as a starting step, authors and editors should keep the importance of adhering to the most cited international name for a given disease and refraining from mentioning other synonyms.

The names	Number of citations in PubMed using the term as a search words	Number of citations in PubMed using the term as a search words, and limiting the search to the title
Benign Symmetric Lipomatosis	94	60
Lanois-Bensaude Syndrome	101	35
Madelung's Disease	412	94
Madelung-Launois-Bensaude syndrome	4	3
Multiple Symmetrical Lipomatosis	358	37

Table I. The different numbers of citations obtained from searching the PubMed with synonyms of Multiple Symmetric Lipomatosis, as of 23 Feb 2012

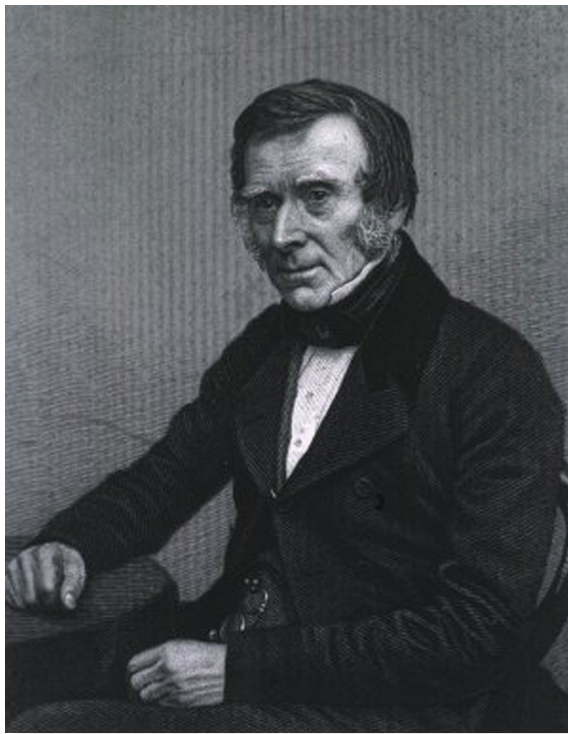


Figure 1. Sir Benjamin Collins Brodie, (1783-1862).
Courtesy of the National Library of Medicine

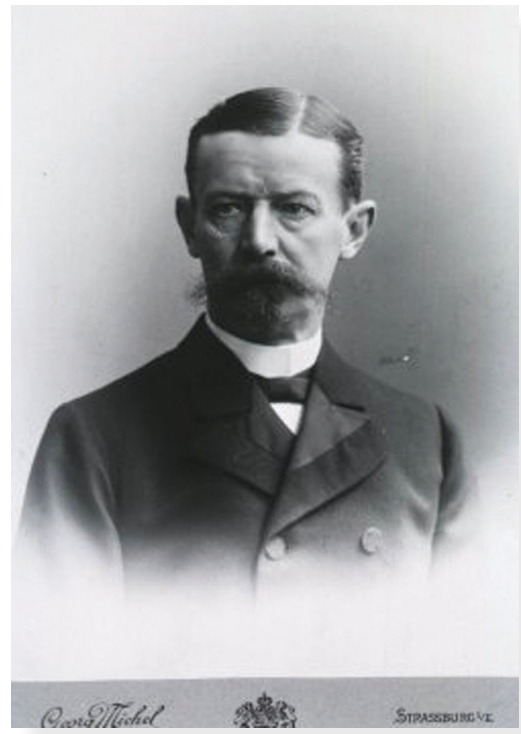


Figure 2. Otto Wilhelm Madelung, (1846-1926).
Courtesy of the National Library of Medicine



Figure 3. Pierre-Emile Launois, (1856-1914).
Courtesy of the National Library of Medicine

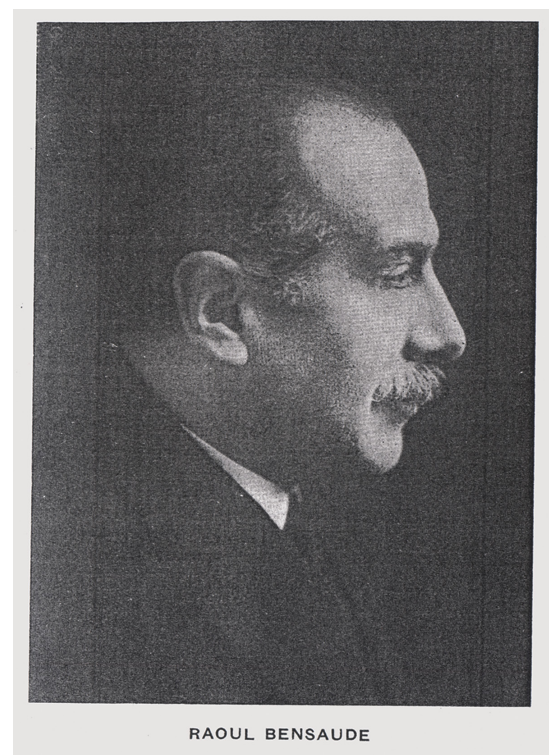


Figure 4. Raoul Bensaude, (1866-1938). Reproduced with permission from reference number 3

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