Christmas Disease, Mozart Ear, and the Stroganoff Method: The Humanity and Hassle of Medical Eponyms

Daniel E. Burgard
University of North Texas Health Science Center at Fort Worth, Daniel.Burgard@unthsc.edu

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1. Picture shown on screen before start of presentation
2. These are just random eponyms and there is no meaning to the layout.
1. This 15-minute presentation is meant to be a fairly light-hearted look at the fascinating phenomenon of medical eponyms. It is not intended to be an exhaustive examination of eponyms. The presentation was first given on Tuesday, October 16, 2012 at the annual meeting of the South Central Chapter of the Medical Library Association in Lubbock, Texas.

2. Christmas Disease – hemophilia b, named after Stephen Christmas, English boy who was first patient described to have disease

3. Mozart Ear – some dispute whether the ear typically shown in pictures belonged to Mozart or his son

4. Stroganoff Method – has nothing to do with the food, but is named after a Russian surgeon, Vasily
Eponyms

• What
• Why
• Problems
• Future
What Are Eponyms?

• Diseases, syndromes, structures, procedures, and devices named after people, places, and things

1. Lou Gehrig is on the left, Babe Ruth on the right. Babe Ruth may or may not be the eponymal inspiration for the Baby Ruth candy bar.
2. Hoboken Valves have nothing to do with Hoboken, NJ, but are named after Nicholas Hoboken and are structures in the umbilical artery.
3. Not really sure if Julius Caesar was surgically removed from his mother – Shakespeare thought so
4. Hieronymus Carl Friedrich von Münchhausen was a German nobleman who told stories about his life adventures.
Why Do We Use Eponyms

- Recognition
- Mnemonic value
- Conciseness
- Context and identity
- Because we are human
  - We love words
  - We love stories
  - We love to name things

1. There are other reasons but the list is kept intentionally short in the interest of time.
1. Aloysius Alzheimer
2. Henry Heimlich
3. Denton Cooley
4. Ebola river in central Africa
Mnemonic Value

- Maple Syrup Urine Disease
- Rapunzel Syndrome
1. Eponyms can be helpful to medical professionals in that they allow for the simple communication of complex terms or procedures.

**Conciseness**

- **Whipple Procedure**
  - Pancreaticoduodenectomy
  - Pancreatic cancer surgical procedure
    - "... removal of the distal half of the stomach (antrectomy), the gall bladder and its cystic duct (cholecystectomy), the common bile duct (choledochectomy), the head of the pancreas, duodenum, proximal jejunum, and regional lymph nodes. Reconstruction consists of attaching the pancreas to the jejunum (pancreaticojejunostomy) and attaching the hepatic duct to the jejunum (hepaticojejunostomy) to allow digestive juices and bide respectively to flow into the gastrointestinal tract and attaching the stomach to the jejunum (gastrojejunostomy) to allow food to pass through." 12
Context and Identity

Lou Gehrig’s Disease

- More than the illness
  - People
  - Place
  - Profession

1. Many thoughts come to mind when one hears “Lou Gehrig’s Disease”
2. Lou Gehrig was struck with the illness in his prime
3. He dealt with his problem with grace and dignity
4. His actions lend an identity to the illness and to the community of those afflicted with ALS
1. Humans will retreat to a familiar place when presented with something unfamiliar or frightening
2. The Lazarus Sign is an eponym that describes arm movement in brain-dead patients.
3. It also can refer to muscular contraction in corpses.
1. Not sure if these are the best examples, but humans like order in their world and like to group things.
2. Southern Blot is actually named after Edwin Southern.
3. Western Blot was named by a person from Stanford who knew quite well that Southern Blot was not named after the geographic South.
4. Northern Blot was developed by the same Stanford scientists.
5. It is not clear if there is an Eastern Blot.
1. These are a sampling of the problems with eponyms.

Problems With Eponyms

- All kinds of bias
- Original meaning eclipsed
- Tainted history
- Can downplay illness
- Not scientific
- Incorrect attribution
- Bibliographic issues
1. As one would expect, individuals from countries where medicine is advance through research and writing are heavily represented in medical eponyms.

2. At various times in history, Italy, England, Germany, and the United States have been at the forefront of medical research and description. Individuals from these countries are heavily represented by medical eponyms.

3. Many human body parts are named for or were named by Italian men. Italians were very active in anatomical dissection and description in the 1500’s.

4. Top right picture is Gabriele Fallopio (or Fallopian in Latin)

5. Bottom right picture is Bartolomeo Eustachi (or Eustachian in Latin)

6. The author assumes that medicine in China has also generated a significant amount of medical eponyms given its longevity and broad development.
1. Lazarus Sign is not going to mean much to someone who is not familiar with the Bible.
2. Similarly, David Letterman Sign, Lauren Hutton Sign, or Terry Thomas Sign will not mean anything to someone not familiar with Western pop culture.
3. Actually, the eponym named after gap-toothed celebrities has nothing to do with teeth, but does describe a widening of a joint space in the wrist.
Original Meaning?

- Gigli Operation
- Hoffa Fracture
- Zellweger Syndrome

1. Sometimes people come along or events happen that eclipse or overshadow the meaning of a medical eponym.
2. Gigli Operation has nothing to do with the 2003 movie but is a surgical procedure named after Italian surgeon and obstetrician Leonardo Gigli.
3. The Hoffa Fracture is not named after Teamster boss Jimmy Hoffa but is named after Albert Hoffa.
4. The Zellweger Syndrome is named after Hans Zellweger, not Renee.
Tainted Eponyms

• Reiter’s Disease
  – Hans Reiter – concentration camp doctor
  – now reactive arthritis

• Wegener's granulomatosis
  – Freidrich Wegener – doctor in Lodz Jewish ghetto
  – renaming to ANCA-associated vasculitis
  – Lifetime of awards
  – American Thoracic Society award in his honor

1. Sometimes, eponyms are named after people who are later determined to have committed acts that are so offensive that people think the eponym should no longer be used. When this happens, successful campaigns can be mounted to eliminate the offensive eponym.

2. Perhaps the best example of this are the eponyms named after physicians who were later determined to have committed various medical atrocities as members of the Nazi Party and German military in WWII.

3. Interestingly, there are a few medical eponyms that are named after victims of the Nazi regime. Perhaps the most well known is Hanz Creutzfeld of Creutzfeld-Jacob Disease. Mr. Creutzfeld’s wife was held in prison by the Nazis during WWII.
1. As we have seen, words are important and what we call a disease can have an effect beyond just naming the illness.

2. An example of this is Chronic Fatigue Syndrome, an illness named after its most visible symptom.

3. For much of the last few decades, a group has been campaigning to change the name of Chronic Fatigue Syndrome.

4. One can find numerous sites and items on the Internet attesting to CFS sufferers’ frustration with often being looked upon as lazy or “just tired.”
One of the basic issues with eponyms is that they lack the precision and portability typical of scientific language.

Eponyms do not translate as well across cultures and geographic boundaries as does basic scientific language.
1. Sometimes eponyms are simply applied incorrectly. Diogenes Syndrome, a term applied to individuals (especially the aged) who hoard personal items and live in isolated squalor, is an example of this. Diogones reputedly lived in a barrel but was neither weighed down by too many possessions or antisocial.

2. It can cause confusion when an illness is inconsistently referred to by both its scientific name and an eponym. Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis and/or Lou Gehrig’s disease is a good example of this.

3. Use of a person’s name as the source of an eponym can lead to pronunciation and identification confusion. Many individuals struggle to correctly pronounce and identify “Alzheimer’s.”

4. All of this non-precise and inconsistent language use can introduce uncertainty into the patient care process.
Incorrect Attribution

- Nonoriginal malappropriate eponymous nomenclature
- Stigler’s Law of Eponymy - 1980
  - “No scientific discovery is named after its original discoverer”
  - Stigler attributed discovery of his law to sociologist Robert Merton

1. “Nonoriginal malappropriate eponymous nomenclature” is a fancy name for the fact that many eponyms are not named after the original discoverer or describer of and illness or syndrome.
2. Stigler and Merton were two University of Chicago researchers who worked on the economic and social aspects of science. Merton was especially interested in the phenomenon that eminent or famous scientists get more recognition than others.
1. Eponyms cause librarians and others a variety of problems due to their confusing and inconsistent use of plural and possessive forms and their non-scientific nature.

2. Few eponyms are MESH headings but most do map to a more scientific or clinically oriented heading. The eponyms that do serve as MESH headings seems to be psychological in nature or ones that have been applied to poorly understood illnesses and syndromes. Alzheimer Disease, Munchausen Syndrome, and Munchausen Syndrome by Proxy are MESH headings while Lou Gehrig’s Disease is not. Lou Gehrig Disease does map to ALS.
1. More study should be done on this topic.

Bibliographic Study

- Research on eponyms in standard pubs – NEJM, JAMA
  - Frequency
  - Trends
  - Meaning
- Word frequency software
Future of Eponyms

• As long as there are humans around, eponyms will be here
• A dash of creativity and humanity in the era of science and evidence
• Boring without them
• Embrace, enjoy, explore
1. When you run across interesting eponyms, please take a few minutes and explore them.

- Satchmo Syndrome
- Mona Lisa Syndrome
- Hamburger Law
1. This slide begins with just “The End” showing but then expands to say “The Endo” and the presenter mentions one last eponym, Endo Agar.
2. It turns out agar itself is an eponym being named for a few of its chemical components.
Works Cited


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