

Physician's Lexicon

Behold, the Ambiguous Root

Homo sapiens [Latin, *sapere*, to be wise] is the Linnaean designation given to the human species, with the genus name for primates, *Homo*, also from the Latin, meaning man. In both medical and theological texts, Homo has been, unambiguously, a name for human or humanoid creatures. In a fateful declarative in the Scriptures, for example, Pontius Pilate, the sixth Procurator of the Roman province of Judea, points to Jesus and declares: "*Ecce Homo*", [Behold, the man.]

Yet four virtually identical roots in English terminology, especially medical vocabulary, result in much misinterpretation of words incorporating the root, *homo-* [*homi-* or *homeo-*].

Words such as homicide and homunculus [meaning little man, from the Latin diminutive of *Homo*] both clearly descend from

the Latin root meaning man.

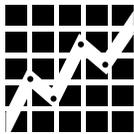
But then there are words such as homosexual, homogamous, homeopathic and homophony where the *homo-* [or *homeo-*] root stems not from the Latin, *homo-* but from the Greek, *omo-* meaning resembling, similar to or identical. Therefore homosexual means having sexual desire for one of the same gender. And a homophone is a word identical in sound to another word but differing in meaning [eg, sale, sail or bear, bare]. Still other terms derived from the Greek *omo*—there is no letter 'h' in Greek—include homodont [teeth of similar form], homogenize [to blend, to make similar], homologous [agreeing, of being of one mind], homoplastic [of being of the same form], all conveying the sense of two or more things resembling or identical to each other in

one or more characteristics.

But then we have a cluster of words such as homiletic [pertaining to sermons or the art of preaching] and homily [a sermon]. These are based upon the Greek word *omilos*, meaning to be together, to converse with, to assemble for conversation and are related, indirectly, to the Greek *omo*.

Finally, there are words based upon the English word, home, all of Old Germanic origin and spelled variously as *hem*, *ham* [as in hamlet], *heim* [as in Blenheim or Mannheim], or *hjem*. The *hem-* root also crops up in the geographic term, Bohemia [*Boii-heim*], meaning the home of the Boi tribes of Celtic ethnicity.

— STANLEY M. ARONSON, MD



RHODE ISLAND DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
DAVID GIFFORD, MD, MPH
DIRECTOR OF HEALTH

VITAL STATISTICS

EDITED BY COLLEEN FONTANA, STATE REGISTRAR

The Rhode Island Department of Health Office of Vital Statistics regrets that this will be *the last month this information will be published* for an indefinite period of time. Staff shortages have created a backlog of tasks, including data entry and data coding. We encourage anyone who has need of this information to call us at 401-222-7822. Some of the data may become available but at irregular intervals.

Rhode Island Monthly Vital Statistics Report Provisional Occurrence Data from the Division of Vital Records

Underlying Cause of Death	Reporting Period			
	April 2008	12 Months Ending with April 2008		
	Number (a)	Number (a)	Rates (b)	YPLL (c)
Diseases of the Heart	226	2,762	261.1	3,417.5
Malignant Neoplasms	197	2,377	224.7	6,650.0
Cerebrovascular Diseases	35	389	36.8	632.5
Injuries (Accidents/Suicide/Homicide)	44	539	51.0	8,451.5
COPD	36	488	46.1	422.5

Vital Events	Reporting Period		
	October 2008	12 Months Ending with October 2008	
	Number	Number	Rates
Live Births	1,102	12,554	11.9*
Deaths	841	10,050	9.5*
Infant Deaths	(8)	(85)	6.8#
Neonatal Deaths	(7)	(68)	5.4#
Marriages	722	5,435	5.1*
Divorces	318	2,783	2.6*
Induced Terminations	not available	not available	not available
Spontaneous Fetal Deaths	not available	not available	not available
Under 20 weeks gestation	--	--	--
20+ weeks gestation	--	--	--

(a) Cause of death statistics were derived from the underlying cause of death reported by physicians on death certificates.

(b) Rates per 100,000 estimated population of 1,067,610 (US Census: July 1, 2007)

(c) Years of Potential Life Lost (YPLL)

Notes: Estimated total population for Rhode Island has been updated in this month's rates.

Totals represent vital events which occurred in Rhode Island for the reporting periods listed above. Monthly provisional totals should be analyzed with caution because the numbers may be small and subject to seasonal variation.

* Rates per 1,000 estimated population

Rates per 1,000 live births