

Physician's Lexicon

Curing Through the Ages

In a moment of atypical modesty, Ambroise Pare (1517 – 1590) declared, “*Je le soignay, Dieu le guerit*” (I treated him, God cured him.) Some anonymous soul responded by noting that every human ailment except vanity is indeed curable, if not by iatrogenic intervention then certainly by death. Curing has always been an integral part of medicine’s explicit mission, and in the naïve thinking of some, even medicine’s primary goal.

The word, cure, has a long history, both in medicine and other professions; and in its journey from the early Latin, it has provided many meanings and nuances.

Cure begins its lexical journey in the Latin word, *cura*, meaning concern or solicitude. In early French, the word, *curer*, meant to cleanse or to heal. And thus *escur* in time evolved into the English word, scour, meaning to clean diligently. The scoop-shaped surgical instrument, the curette, is thus originally a scouring or cleansing instrument.

To cure, in a medical sense, then, is to heal, to bring resolution to an ailment. Curing, in a gastronomic sense, however, means to modify a food product, to delay its deterioration—usually by smoking or salting—so as to preserve it.

The medieval Latin, *curatus*, came to mean a church official (a curate) or a cure, a parish priest, one who cleanses away sin or who heals spiritually. A similar English word, curia, however, was originally the name for the ancient Roman senate and is currently a synonym of the papal court at the Vatican. The word, curia, however, is derived from a proto-Latin phrase meaning community of men.

The word, curious, stems from the Latin, *curiosus* meaning diligent, careful, inquisitive. Similar English words include curio, curiosity and even accurate, meaning precise, free of defect, in conformity with a model. The Latin, *accuratus*, meaning toward exactitude, free of error (the Latin prefix, *ac-*, generally

means toward or in the direction of) is the ancestor of the English, accuracy.

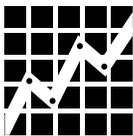
The act of healing or cleansing the fingers, thus, is a manicure (Latin, *manus*, meaning hand, as in words such as manual or manifest); and cleansing the feet, is a pedicure (Latin, *pedis*, meaning foot, as in words such as pedestal, pedestrian, pedal).

Still other English words, such as procure and secure, trace their meanings back to the Latin, *cura*.

Kipling, not a physician, versified his thoughts on curing:

The cure for this ill is not to sit still,
Or frowst with a book by the fire;
But to take a large hoe and a shovel also,
And dig till you gently perspire.

— STANLEY M. ARONSON, MD



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

VITAL STATISTICS

EDITED BY COLLEEN FONTANA, STATE REGISTRAR

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

Underlying Cause of Death	Reporting Period			
	February 2009	12 Months Ending with February 2009		
	Number (a)	Number (a)	Rates (b)	YPLL (c)
Diseases of the Heart	187	2,539	241.6	3,045.0
Malignant Neoplasms	189	2,259	215.0	6,267.5
Cerebrovascular Diseases	24	406	38.6	622.5
Injuries (Accidents/Suicide/Homicide)	37	552	52.5	8,666.0
COPD	51	478	45.5	422.0

Vital Events	Reporting Period		
	August 2009	12 Months Ending with August 2009	
	Number	Number	Rates
Live Births	1,096	12,389	11.6*
Deaths	766	9,543	8.9*
Infant Deaths	(5)	(82)	6.6#
Neonatal Deaths	(4)	(65)	5.2#
Marriages	850	6,290	5.9*
Divorces	166	2,767	2.6*
Induced Terminations	339	4,327	349.3#
Spontaneous Fetal Deaths	33	782	63.1#
Under 20 weeks gestation	(26)	(686)	55.4#
20+ weeks gestation	(7)	(96)	7.7#

(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 1,050,788

(c) Years of Potential Life Lost (YPLL)

Note: 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