

Physician's Lexicon

A Prescription for Atonement

A **contrite person** is one who is overcome with guilt, a penitent individual seeking atonement. The word stems from the Latin, *contritus*, meaning to grind, to bruise, to wear away. The same Latin word, without a hint of atonement, is used in standard medical prescriptions (*contritus*, or its abbreviation, *contrit.*) to instruct the pharmacist to grind up or pulverize the medication.

Few physicians today provide detailed instructions to the pharmacist on written prescriptions since virtually all medications are now factory-prepared in both weight and composition. And fewer newly graduated physicians have formal instructions on the use of medical Latin and the five segments of the standard prescription (*superscriptio*, *recipio*, *inscriptio*, *subscriptio* and *signatura*.)

Some instructions persist as distant memories of a time when physicians and pharmacists conversed with each other in Latin. In addition to the *b.i.d.*, *t.i.d.*, *q.i.d.* abbreviations still employed, there is *alternis diebus* (*alt.dieb.*) meaning every other day, *u.d.* (*ut dictum*) meaning as directed, and *ad nauseam* (*ad naus.*) meaning to be taken until nausea supervenes. A simple, *n.r.* (*non repetatur*) signifies to the pharmacist: do not repeat. And *s.o.s.* (*si opus sit*) means if necessary.

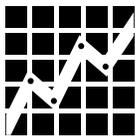
Virtually all phrases used in prescriptions are of Latin origin. An occasional word, still Latin, is descended from an earlier Greek term. Thus the Latin, *nauseam*, comes from a Greek word, *nausia*, meaning sea-sickness, literally ship-sickness. English words of similar derivation include nautical and nautilus. A family of mollusks is also referred to as *Nautilus*.

In Homer's *Odyssey*, the daughter of Alcinous, king of the Phaeacians, is Nausicaa, a name that means, literally, "burner of ships."

In compounding prescriptions, pharmacists would be directed to make the medication agreeable to taste, *ad gratum gustum*, (abbreviated as *ad grat. gust.*), of proper and pleasing consistency: *debita spissitudine*, abbreviated as *deb. spis.*

The root, *contritus*, also finds its way in the English noun, trituration, the act of reducing a medication to a fine powder. And the Latin word, *trititum*, means a grain of wheat, suggesting that edible wheat-flour is obtained by threshing or grinding the harvested plant.

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VITAL STATISTICS

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

Underlying Cause of Death	Reporting Period			
	January 2010	12 Months Ending with January 2010		
	Number (a)	Number (a)	Rates (b)	YPLL (c)
Diseases of the Heart	209	2,355	223.6	3,282.0
Malignant Neoplasms	184	2,271	215.6	6,387.5
Cerebrovascular Diseases	42	435	41.3	889.5
Injuries (Accidents/Suicide/Homicide)	58	599	56.9	10,368.5
COPD	48	507	48.1	450.0

Vital Events	Reporting Period		
	July 2010	12 Months Ending with July 2010	
	Number	Number	Rates
Live Births	1,017	12,099	11.3*
Deaths	761	9,133	8.6*
Infant Deaths	(7)	(89)	7.4#
Neonatal Deaths	(7)	(74)	6.1#
Marriages	805	6,081	5.7*
Divorces	238	3,233	3.0*
Induced Terminations	301	4,203	347.4#
Spontaneous Fetal Deaths	68	663	54.8#
Under 20 weeks gestation	(62)	(597)	65.4#
20+ weeks gestation	(6)	(66)	5.5#

(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 1,053,209.

(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