

Physician's Lexicon

An Intersection of Languages

Contemporary medicine and its current vocabulary is the grateful recipient of the lexical riches of two successive, classical languages: Greek and Latin. Inevitably, then, roots derived from these Classical tongues may look much like each other but carry differing meanings. These resulting ambiguities are best illustrated by the *ped-*, *pedi-*, and *pes-* roots, from the Latin, generally meaning foot. And the *podo-* – from the Greek, also meaning foot; but then there is, from the Greek, *pais-* or *paido-* (in English, spelled as *pedo-* or *paedo-*) meaning boy or child of either gender.

The Latin root, *ped-*, generates such English terms as pedal, peduncle, pedometer, pedestal, pedestrian, pedicure and pediment, each pertaining to the foot, or uses of the foot. The word, pedigree, is derived from the French phrase *pie de grue*, meaning a crane's foot because it

resembles the genealogic marks used in defining family trees. Orthopedics is literally straight, or corrected, feet, as is orthodontia, meaning straightened teeth.

But then we encounter the words, *pediculosis* (louse-ridden) and *pediculocide* (an agent used to kill lice.) The parasitic genus, *Pediculus*, is composed of many-footed insects and hence its name.

The Greek, *podo-* root also gives rise to numerous words pertaining to the foot: words such as podagra (an obsolete term for gout), podiatry, podium and podophyl-lum (literally, a plant with leafed feet.)

The *paedo-* or *pais-* Greek root pertaining to male child in general, yields English words such as pediatrics (the *iatrikos* root meaning physician or healer), pedagogue (a teacher, with the Greek root, *agogos*, meaning to lead, to guide and sometimes to flow forth as in words such as cholagogue),

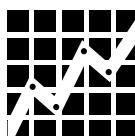
pedant (a teacher of children), pedantic (an adjective describing the trait of excessive scholarliness; Ambrose Bierce once described pedantry as dust shaken out of a book and into an empty skull) and pederasty (sexual molestation of children).

The *pes-* root, pertaining to the foot, is used in such medical phrases as *pes abductus* (*talipes valgus*) and *pes cavus*.

Pessimism, the belief that the evil in this world outweighs the good, comes from the Latin, *pessimus*, meaning worst and probably stems, earlier, from the Latin *ped's mal*, meaning a bad foot or a bad foundation. The English word, pejorative, is a descendant of *pessimus*.

Peddle and peddler, on the other hand, come from a Germanic root meaning basket.

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

VITAL STATISTICS

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Underlying Cause of Death	Reporting Period		
	March 2010	12 Months Ending with March 2010	
	Number (a)	Rates (b)	YPLL (c)
Diseases of the Heart	197	2,352	223.3
Malignant Neoplasms	192	2,244	213.1
Cerebrovascular Diseases	40	450	42.7
Injuries (Accidents/Suicide/Homicide)	48	605	57.4
COPD	47	489	46.4
			10,497.5
			490.0

Vital Events	Reporting Period		
	September 2010	12 Months Ending with September 2010	
	Number	Number	Rates
Live Births	1,030	11,985	11.2*
Deaths	768	9,127	8.5*
Infant Deaths	(2)	(80)	6.7#
Neonatal Deaths	(2)	(65)	5.4#
Marriages	778	5,969	5.6*
Divorces	333	3,213	3.0*
Induced Terminations	322	4,251	354.7#
Spontaneous Fetal Deaths	30	609	50.8#
Under 20 weeks gestation	(22)	(544)	59.6#
20+ weeks gestation	(8)	(65)	5.4#

(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 that 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