

# Physician's Lexicon

## The Pt-vehicles, Ancient and Modern

**LONG BEFORE THE AMERICAN NAVY** introduced rapidly maneuverable patrol-torpedo vessels (called PT Boats) the ancient Greeks had infiltrated their vocabulary with words beginning with the improbable combination of letters 'P' and 'T'.

Parmic, for example, is an adjective meaning a susceptibility to sneezing. And Parmica is the botanical genus for what is colloquially called, sneezewort. (The family of arctic grouse called ptarmigan, however, gets its name from a Gaelic word meaning croaker.)

The Greek prefixes, *pteno-*, *ptero-* and *pterygo-* begin words describing things that are feathered, winged or capable of flight; or, remotely, something that falls from flight. Thus an extinct flying reptile is named pterodactyl, with the *dactyl* root meaning toe or finger (as in

dactylogram, an earlier word for fingerprint.) A pteropus is a genus of fruit bats (literally, wing-footed.) And pterygoid is an adjective meaning winglike. And an aircraft called helicopter is one that employs rotating blades to achieve flight (*helico-*, Greek for spiral.)

Ptomaine, nitrogenous substances generated in the process of putrefaction and often poisonous, is a word coined by the Italian chemist Francesco Selmi (1817 – 1881) from the Greek, *ptoma*, meaning something that has fallen down, a corpse, and now, poisonous.

The Greek prefix, *pteris-*, defines the botanical world of the ferns or related plants. And thus, pteridology becomes the study of ferns.

Ptosis is a medical term describing the prolapse or sagging of an organ or anatomic structure, typically the eyelids. Its

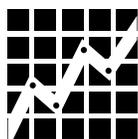
meaning is derived from the older sense of the root, *pt-*, a falling down or dying.

Ptyalin, an amylase found in saliva, derives directly from the Greek *ptyalos*, meaning saliva and descends through Latin, Gothic and Old English to give birth to words such as spew and spittle.

The *pt-* combination emerges also in forming the family name of the Greco-Egyptian kings, the Ptolemies, a word derived from the Greek *ptolemos*, meaning war-like. The origin of the name, Ptah, the arch-diety of the Egyptian cosmogony, is obscure.

In the more archaic languages preceding Greek, the Indo-European tongues, the *pt-* combination tends to be separated and appears as *pet-*. Over the succeeding millennia, the intervening *e-* has disappeared.

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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			
	November 2010	12 Months Ending with November 2010		
	Number (a)	Number (a)	Rates (b)	YPLL (c)
Diseases of the Heart	194	2,241	212.8	3,002.0
Malignant Neoplasms	204	2,302	218.6	6,044.0
Cerebrovascular Diseases	43	455	43.2	714.5
Injuries (Accidents/Suicide/Homicide)	58	619	58.8	9,988.5
COPD	40	508	48.2	535.0

Vital Events	Reporting Period		
	May 2011	12 Months Ending with May 2011	
	Number	Number	Rates
Live Births	1,005	11,747	11.2*
Deaths	810	10,001	9.5*
Infant Deaths	(9)	(72)	6.1#
Neonatal Deaths	(7)	(70)	6.0#
Marriages	550	6,118	5.8*
Divorces	264	3,308	3.1*
Induced Terminations	360	4,084	347.7#
Spontaneous Fetal Deaths	64	648	55.2#
Under 20 weeks gestation	(50)	(568)	56.8#
20+ weeks gestation	(14)	(78)	6.6#

(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. (www.census.gov)

(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