



Physician's Lexicon

The Rh Words of Medicine

RHO, THE 17TH LETTER OF THE CLASSICAL Greek alphabet, is derived earlier from the Semitic, *resh*; and when it is transcribed to words in contemporary English, it often includes the *rh-* combination of glyphs. A handful—a rhetorical, rhapsodic handful, perhaps—are of medical importance.

Rheum, a noun describing a fluid discharge from the mucous membranes, is derived from the Greek, *rheuma*, meaning that which flows, a flux. A family of words stem from it, including rheumatism, rheumatoid and rheumatology, a major branch of medicine that includes the various forms of arthritis.

Rhino-, from a Greek word for nose, has given birth to medical terms such as rhinencephalon, the olfactory segment of the forebrain; rhinocephaly, a form of neural birth malformation; rhinalgia, pain in the nose; rhinolalia, a nasal distortion of speech (*lalein*, Greek, to stutter, to prattle); and, of course, rhinoceros, the tropical

beast, (*ceros*, from Greek, meaning horn or thickened skin.)

Rhabdo-, from a Greek root meaning rod (as in rhabdomanancy, divination with a rod and rhabdophobia, a fear of a whipping rod). This root, when linked to *myo-*, a Greek root meaning muscle or mouse, creates the complex root meaning striated muscle, with such words as rhabdomyoma and rhabdomyolysis.

A rhonchus, from the Greek, *rhonkos*, defines a snoring sound.

The Greek root, *rheo-*, meaning a stream or current, gives rise to words such as rheostat, rheotropism and rheometry, the measurement of blood flow by electrical instruments. And then, as a suffix, *-rrhea*, it creates such words as diarrhea, rhinorrhea, gonorrhoea and logorrhea.

The Rh factor defines an immunogenic blood antigen first noted in 1939 by Philip Levine and Rufus Stetson and then fully explored by Alexander Wiener and Karl Land-

steiner in 1940. The name is derived from *Rhesus macaque*, a primate whose blood was employed to yield the Rh factor.

The combining form, *rhizo-* is from the Greek meaning root or branch. Most words containing this root are of botanical origin such as rhizome, Rhizopus and rhizopogous. Rhizotomy is a medical term defining the cutting of spinal nerve roots.

The root, *rhodo-*, generally refers to the color rose, as in rhodomycin, rhodogenesis, rhodium (the salts of which are reddish in color) and even rhododendron.

Not to be forgotten are such additional *rh-* words as rhubarb, rhetoric, rhea, rhenish and of course, Rhode Island.

And for the very erudite, there was the demigod Rhadamanthus, son of Zeus and Europa, and one of three Hellenic judges of the dead (the other two, Minos and Aiakos.)

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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 2011	12 Months Ending with January 2011		
	Number (a)	Number (a)	Rates (b)	YPLL (c)
Diseases of the Heart	235	2,291	217.5	3,294.5
Malignant Neoplasms	191	2,301	218.5	5,991.5
Cerebrovascular Diseases	44	455	43.2	727.0
Injuries (Accidents/Suicide/Homicide)	52	625	59.3	9,839.0
COPD	54	517	49.1	445.0

Vital Events	Reporting Period		
	July 2011	12 Months Ending with July 2011	
	Number	Number	Rates
Live Births	1,041	11,724	11.1*
Deaths	791	9,956	9.5*
Infant Deaths	(9)	(67)	5.7#
Neonatal Deaths	(6)	(64)	5.5#
Marriages	842	6,181	5.9*
Divorces	256	3,350	3.2*
Induced Terminations	320	4,073	347.4#
Spontaneous Fetal Deaths	47	630	53.7#
Under 20 weeks gestation	(38)	(546)	54.8#
20+ weeks gestation	(9)	(82)	7.0#

(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