

Physician's Lexicon

The Florid Eponyms of Medicine

DREAMS OF IMMORTALITY ARE RARELY A conscious element in the stressful lives of physicians. Just getting through each day without adding measurably to one's list of problems is a sufficient objective for most of us. It is rare, then, for a physician's name to be perpetuated beyond his obituary notices except if an ailment (eg, Bright's Disease), a clinical sign (eg, Babinski Sign), a vaccine (eg, Salk polio vaccine) or a type of neurological abnormality (eg, Jacksonian seizure) bears his name.

Physicians don't have mountains, rivers or other major geographic sites named after them. But in one small scientific endeavor, the names of physicians used as eponyms, predominates: the field of ornamental flowers. This was no accident of fate since botany and medicine were inextricably intermixed until recent centuries. And, accordingly, so many trained physicians of prior centuries were also botanists seeking naturally-occurring

pharmaceuticals to be employed as empiric remedies for their patients.

Consider how many of the currently enjoyed flowers bear the name – sometimes slightly modified – of practicing physicians. Leonhard Fuchs, born in Bavaria in 1501, was professor of medicine at Tübingen University. He was one of the first to describe the therapeutic effects of foxglove. And the *fuchsia* is named in his honor.

Matthias de Lobel, a 16th Century native of France, emigrated to England, eventually becoming court physician to James I. The *lobelia* is named after him. Pierre Magnol born in 1638, and professor of medicine at Montpellier, was France's most eminent botanist in the 17th Century, is immortalized in the *magnolia*.

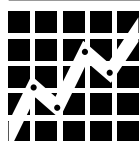
Geore Camellus, a 17th Century missionary-physician-botanist, is remembered through the *camellia*. Olaf Rudbeck, Sweden's great physician botanist (and mentor to

Carolus Linnaeus) has given his name to the *rudbeckia*. And yet another Swedish physician, Anders Dahl (a student of Linnaeus) is immortalized in the *dahlia*.

Caspar Wistar, born in Philadelphia in 1761, taught medicine at University of Pennsylvania, created what is now the Wistar Institute, and had the *wisteria* plants named after him. And one should not forget Joel Poinsett of South Carolina, Madison's roving ambassador, world traveler, botanist and later, congressman has his name given to the *poinsettia* plants.

Few of these physician-botanists are remembered today in the formal annals of medicine. Yet they have been truly immortalized in the naming of many actively enjoyed plants. Given a choice, would any aspiring physician wish to be remembered as a form of gout or, alternatively, as a glorious blossom such as the magnolia?

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

VITAL STATISTICS

EDITED BY COLLEEN FONTANA, STATE REGISTRAR

| Underlying Cause of Death | Reporting Period | | | |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------|---------------------|
| | August 2011 | 12 Months Ending with August 2011 | | |
| Diseases of the Heart | Number (a) 189 | Number (a) 2,440 | Rates (b) 231.7 | YPLL (c) 3,730.0 |
| Malignant Neoplasms | 188 | 2,263 | 214.9 | 5,624.5 |
| Cerebrovascular Diseases | 36 | 452 | 42.9 | 779.5 |
| Injuries (Accidents/Suicide/Homicide) | 65 | 675 | 64.1 | 9,813.0 |
| COPD | 46 | 554 | 52.6 | 465.0 |

| Vital Events | Reporting Period | | |
|--------------------------|------------------|-------------------------------------|--------|
| | February 2012 | 12 Months Ending with February 2012 | |
| | Number | Number | Rates |
| Live Births | 925 | 12,620 | 12.0* |
| Deaths | 840 | 10,482 | 10.0* |
| Infant Deaths | (11) | (88) | 7.0# |
| Neonatal Deaths | (10) | (68) | 5.4# |
| Marriages | 278 | 6,523 | 6.2* |
| Divorces | 269 | 3,662 | 3.5* |
| Induced Terminations | 359 | 4,463 | 353.6# |
| Spontaneous Fetal Deaths | 56 | 687 | 54.4# |
| Under 20 weeks gestation | (51) | (585) | 55.8# |
| 20+ weeks gestation | (5) | (100) | 7.9# |

(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 1,052,567. (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