Physician’s Lexicon
A Proliferation of Pro- Words

The standard medical dictionary provides us with 17 pages of technical words beginning with the prefix, pro-, totaling about 1,800 health-related terms. This English prefix actually represents two closely related prefixes of Greek origin: pro-, generally meaning before, forward or pre-cursor of. And proto- (sometimes proteo-), denoting something highest in rank or first in a series. Proteus, also, was the mythological sea-god of the Greeks.

Most medical words beginning with pro- are self-evident etymologically and need no clarification. Some, however, are worthy of exploration.

The word, protein, was invented by the Swedish chemist, Jons Berzelius (1779-1848) and popularized by the Dutch chemist-physician, Gerardus Mulder (1802-1879) and profusely used by the Dutch. It was based on the Greek, protos, meaning first and another Greek word, kollen, describing a glue used to paste together the transcriptions of official meetings. Something which is profane is something, literally, in front of or beyond the temple perimeter (from the Latin, fanum, meaning temple) and hence a way of describing something confined to the secular realm and hence not sacred.

A procurer, again from the Greek via Latin, was the fusion of pro- and curare, meaning to attend to, to take care of, leading also to such English church terms as curate or cure. (The botanical substance, curare, was based on the Greek, cura, to feed in front.)

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Prognosis is similarly an amalgamation of the Greek, pro- and gnosis, thus meaning to know beforehand. A progenitor, an ancestor, is from the Latin, progenitus, but ultimately, as with so much of Latin, from the Greek.

Many of the pro- words, (such as prodigal, prodigy, proctitis, probity and problematic) in their passage from the Greek through centuries of Latin and then French, have their sense so transformed that their current meanings are at best caricatures of their original intent.

Stanley M. Aronson, MD

VITAL STATISTICS

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Underlying Cause of Death</th>
<th>Reporting Period</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>November 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number (a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diseases of the Heart</td>
<td>195</td>
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<tr>
<td>Malignant Neoplasms</td>
<td>181</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cerebrovascular Diseases</td>
<td>34</td>
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<tr>
<td>Injuries (Accidents/Suicide/Homicide)</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COPD</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(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

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