A Manual of Some Handy Words of Medicine
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When our ancestral physicians in the Mediterranean region needed words to define and describe the activities of the human hand and the diseases arising from manual labor, they had such phonemic Greek roots as chiro- meaning hand and the origin of words such as chirurgeon [shortened now to surgeon], chiropractic and chiromancy; the Latin, manus, also meaning hand and its derived words such as manicure, manual and manubrium; and the Greek, carpus, meaning wrist and the source of words such as metacarpal and carpoptosis.

But man’s ingenuity relentlessly seeks new manmade products and even new occupations unknown to their Roman or Hellenic ancestors. And physicians, encountering these heretofore unknown ailments are then required by tradition to find new, identifying names for them.

Excessive use of a typewriter, for example, led to a syndrome consisting of wrist-cramps, tingling or burning sensations in the hand, weakness and lancinating pains in the affected limb. The ipsilateral median nerve as it passes through the carpal tunnel is increasingly compressed by traumatized tendons in the tunnel, leading to Carpal Tunnel Syndrome, or various forms of Writer’s Cramps.

The Iraqi security police (Muhkabarat) of the Saddam Hussein era, were widely known for their aggressive interrogation procedures, one leading to the removal of the prisoner’s fingernails, termed later, by American troops as an Iraqi Manicure.

In a brief note published in the New England Journal of Medicine, in 1988, H.R. Jones, MD, described an instance of labor-related motor dysfunction of the hand caused by occupational pressure on the ulnar nerve in its palmar passage. The patient, a young male, had worked in a fast-food pizza parlor. One of his functions was to divide large, freshly prepared pizzas into pie-shaped segments. To accomplish this, he used a roller-blade cutter, the handle of which was pressed firmly against the palm resulting, after time, in Pizza-Cutter’s Palsy. This occupational disorder bore the name, Repetitive Strain Injury, in England and was part of an assemblage of similar work-related afflictions such as Telegrapher’s Cramp and Sprout-Picker’s Thumb.

Physicians, preparing themselves for diseases of the future, should seek out such television-related ailments as Remote-Control Monitor’s Palsy, Couch Potato Decubiti (CPD) and Fourth Quarter Dementia, sometimes Brewery-Enhanced.
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100 Years Ago: The Arnold Laboratory at Brown Breaks Ground

Dr. Oliver H. Arnold funded lab, the precursor to today’s medical school

MARY KORR
RIMJ MANAGING EDITOR

PROVIDENCE – James Walter Wilson (1896–1969) was a freshman at Brown University in 1914 when the Arnold Biological Laboratory began construction, with funds donated by DR. OLIVER H. ARNOLD, class of 1865.

Wilson would later rise to the position of chairman of the Dept. of Biology, which he held from 1945–1960. In the December 1960 issue of the Brown Alumni Monthly, Professor Wilson wrote that Dr. Arnold was a member of the Visiting Committee of the biology department, and related the following anecdote:

The late President Faunce liked to tell how an unannounced visitor arrived at his office one day and had a little trouble getting past his secretary. He had come to tell Prexy that he wanted to give Brown money for a lab. The donation was about $85,000...

In a later Brown annual report, President Faunce described Dr. Oliver this way:

The story of Dr. Arnold’s life, so simple, frugal and obscure, but cherishing a great vision, is fascinating indeed. His rise from poverty to affluence, his devotion to his patients, largely in the rural regions around Providence, his scientific enthusiasm, which led him to drop all practice and spend the years 1883–85 in Vienna, Berlin, London and Glasgow (while Mrs. Arnold was studying Semitic languages with famous German professors), his shy-broaching of his purpose to build the laboratory, his pride and pleasure in working out the details of his gift, all these are the elements in a deeply interesting career, so quiet that our Faculty did not know of his Existence...

A biographical sketch of Dr. Arnold in the 1891 History of Providence County, RI, by Richard M. Bayles states that Dr. Arnold received his medical degree from Harvard in 1867, whereupon he “began the practice of medicine at Pawtucket, with Doctor Charles F. Manchester, with whom he remained about four years, having also been a student of Doctor A. H. Okie, of Providence. He continued the practice of his profession from that time to 1883 alone.

“In the summer of 1883 he went to Europe, and remained there two years, traveling, and studying in the hospitals of London, Glasgow, Paris and Vienna, most of the time in the last mentioned place. On his return in 1885 he located in Providence, where he still continues. He was married in 1868, to Emma Josephine Ayer, of Providence. He has had a large and successful practice as a physician.”

Dr. Arnold died in 1911. The terms of Dr. Arnold’s will left $60,000 for the laboratory, $10,000 for a biological fellowship, $10,000 for an archaeological fellowship, dedicated to the memory of his wife, in the Women’s College, and $5,000 for three Women’s College scholarships.

This brief article appeared in the New York Times in 1912. The Arnold Laboratory at Brown University on Waterman Street was built in 1915 for $80,000. It provided offices for five professors and later, in 1938, the auditorium on the first floor became a biological sciences library, and three laboratories were installed. Eventually it housed the administrative offices of the medical school.