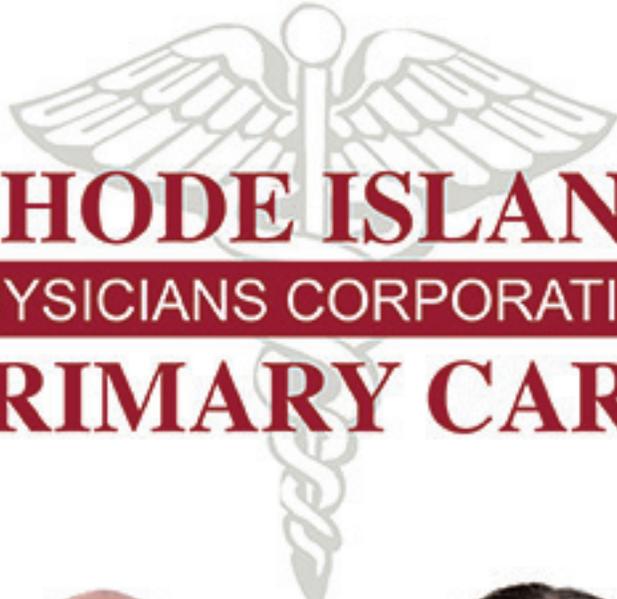


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Medicine and its Many Numbers

STANLEY M. ARONSON, MD

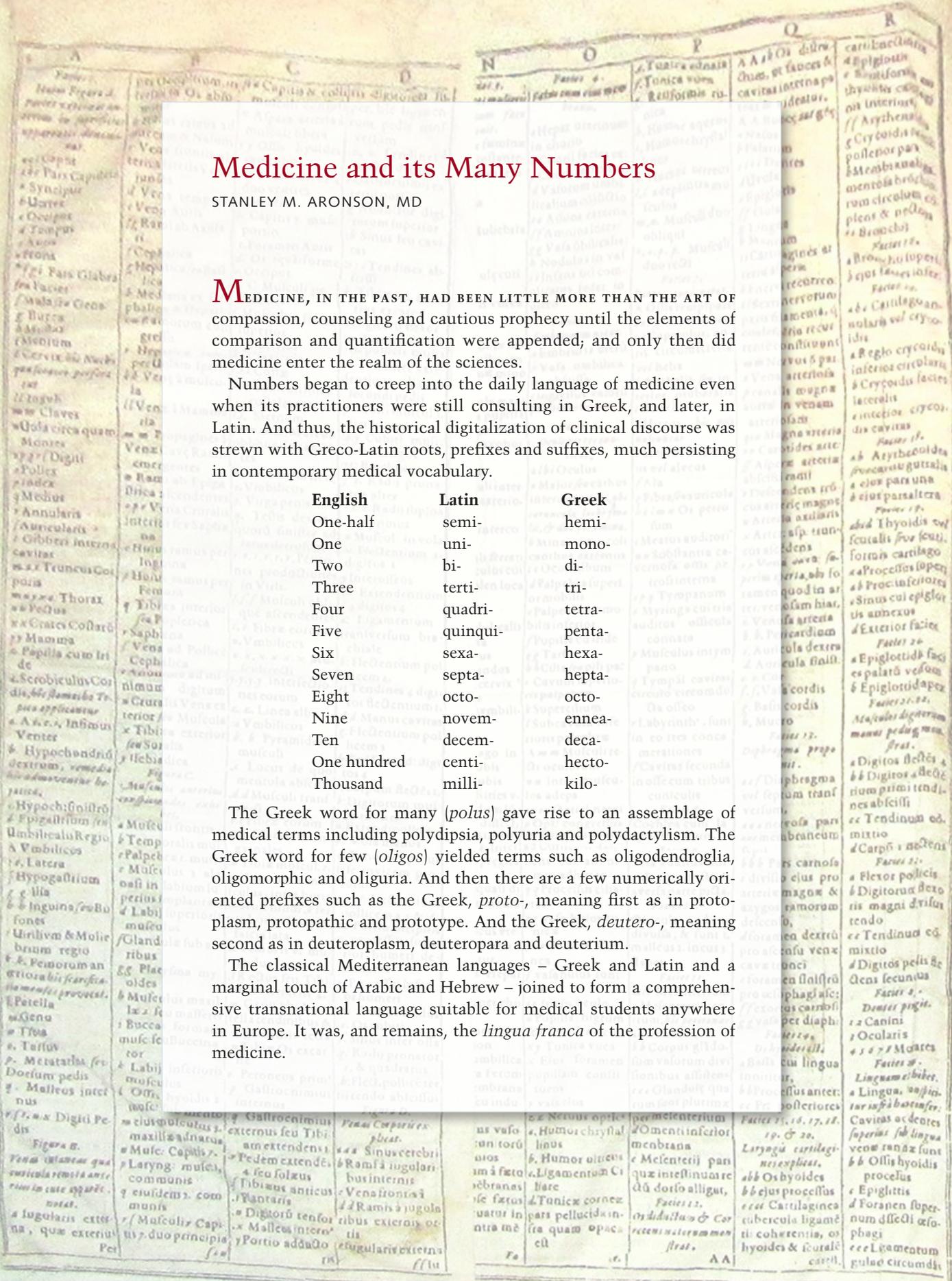
MEDICINE, IN THE PAST, HAD BEEN LITTLE MORE THAN THE ART OF compassion, counseling and cautious prophecy until the elements of comparison and quantification were appended, and only then did medicine enter the realm of the sciences.

Numbers began to creep into the daily language of medicine even when its practitioners were still consulting in Greek, and later, in Latin. And thus, the historical digitalization of clinical discourse was strewn with Greco-Latin roots, prefixes and suffixes, much persisting in contemporary medical vocabulary.

English	Latin	Greek
One-half	semi-	hemi-
One	uni-	mono-
Two	bi-	di-
Three	terti-	tri-
Four	quadri-	tetra-
Five	quinqui-	penta-
Six	sexa-	hexa-
Seven	septa-	hepta-
Eight	octo-	octo-
Nine	novem-	ennea-
Ten	decem-	deca-
One hundred	centi-	hecto-
Thousand	milli-	kilo-

The Greek word for many (*polus*) gave rise to an assemblage of medical terms including polydipsia, polyuria and polydactylism. The Greek word for few (*oligos*) yielded terms such as oligodendroglia, oligomorphic and oliguria. And then there are a few numerically oriented prefixes such as the Greek, *proto-*, meaning first as in protoplasm, protopathic and prototype. And the Greek, *deutero-*, meaning second as in deutero-embryon, deutero-para and deuterium.

The classical Mediterranean languages – Greek and Latin and a marginal touch of Arabic and Hebrew – joined to form a comprehensive transnational language suitable for medical students anywhere in Europe. It was, and remains, the *lingua franca* of the profession of medicine.



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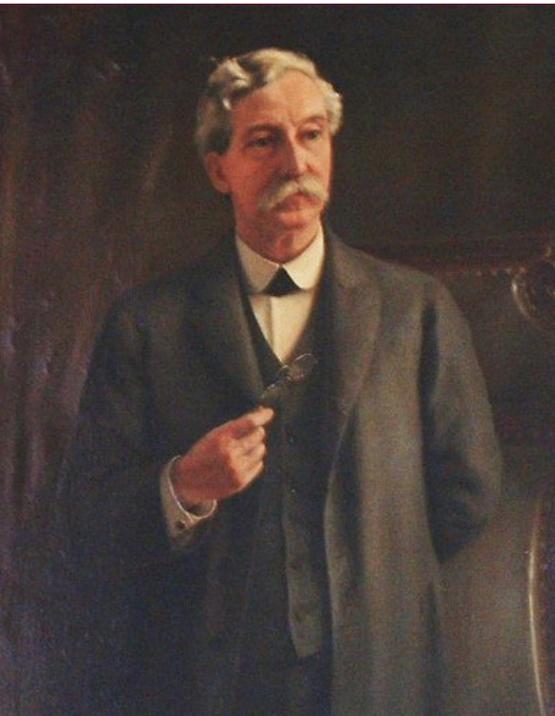
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November 1902: Lucius F. C. Garvin, MD, elected governor

'He worked for justice'

MARY KORR
RIMJ MANAGING EDITOR



Formal portrait of Gov. Lucius F. C. Garvin, MD. The Rhode Island Heritage Hall of Fame inducted Dr. Garvin in 2008.

In November 1902, Lucius F. C. Garvin, MD, was elected governor of Rhode Island. His road to politics and his reform agenda were born in the Lonsdale mills. After earning his MD at Harvard Medical School in 1867, he took a position as company physician at The Lonsdale Company, a complex of mills, machine shops and blocks of workers' homes which engulfed three towns.

As company physician, he was on call day and night. Dr. Garvin rounded in his buggy until 1899, when he swapped his horses for a bicycle. But it was the plight of the mill children which led him into the political arena, and eventually to the State House, where he served as governor for two terms. "Impoverished circumstances drive children to wage earning," he stated in an address to his colleagues at the Rhode Island Medical Society.

At the American Public Health Association in 1876, he spoke on the most common forms of mill injuries – limbs

lacerated by moving gears, which resulted in amputation or permanent maiming. He presented 36 cases; six of the victims were children from 8 to 11 years old, though the hiring of anyone under 12 was illegal by state law.

"Experience shows that these iron cogs...catching the side or tip of the operative's finger, without warning, draw it rapidly in, while, like a hungry shark, the second set, reaching farther on, takes a better hold and again draws in – the first laceration of the flesh being but a prelude to crushing the bone."

He also reported on the high rate of infant mortality among working mothers, and the prevalence of "anemia, dyspepsia, and phthisis pulmonalis." He described one night call to an attic bedroom where the "surcharged atmosphere...calls to mind the effluvium which arose from the hatchway of ships used for transporting soldiers during the late war." (Dr. Garvin was a Civil War veteran who had contracted a prolonged bout of malaria while serving.)

He proposed a resolution supporting mandatory half-day schooling for those under 16, frequent inspections of the mills and mill houses, an authorized public health officer to inspect the milk supply, tougher child labor laws and stricter enforcement of current law. The Blackstone River, he asserted, was a sewer.

Dr. Garvin first entered politics when he was elected Cumberland's representative (Democrat) in the state legislature in 1883, where he championed pro-labor legislation, voting reform, and proportional representation based on population. He served 16 terms as a lawmaker.

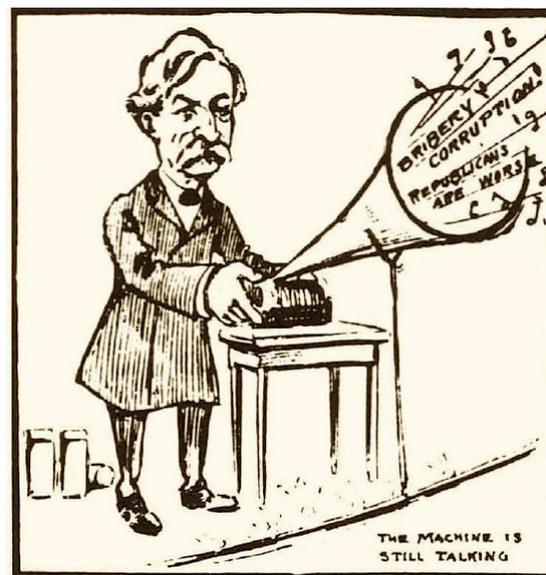
In 1897, the *Pawtucket Gazette and Chronicle* credited his efforts in helping pass legislation for a 10-hour work day for conductors and motormen, ballot reform, the establishment of a Bureau of

Industrial Statistics, and a law on factory inspections with enforcement powers.

In 1902, he launched his second gubernatorial fight. The national pro-labor newspaper *Outlook* noted his stunning victory, after a loss the year earlier: "Powerful boss rule may be, and often is, overthrown by patient, persistent and upright effort to guard and preserve the real interests of the public. What Dr. Garvin will do in the executive branch only time will tell."

Historians relate the lack of veto and appointment powers enacted by Charles "Boss" Brayton and his Republican cronies robbed Gov. Garvin of any effectiveness during his two terms (1903–1905).

Dr. Garvin would later recall the life of a country physician was "no bed of roses." By his count, he had delivered over a thousand babies in Lonsdale, hurrying to bedsides in the worst of winters. He charged \$6 per delivery (\$8 at night), which included several post-natal visits. Yet for 55 years, the practice of medicine was the one constant in Dr. Garvin's life. Known to have heart disease, he died suddenly at work on October 2, 1922. His tombstone in Swan Point Cemetery is inscribed, "He worked for justice. ♦"



Editorial cartoon from a Providence newspaper reflected the criticism of his Republican opponents.

The public's health in 1912–1913, Rhode Island



On November 26, 1912, renowned photojournalist Lewis Wickes Hine (1874–1940) took these photographs.

The photo above shows the entrance to “the crowded, dirty house of a midwife, rear tenement on Spruce Street, Providence,” according to Hine’s description.

The photo at right is of a sick worker receiving first aid in a room set apart for hospital use in the Brym & Marsh manufacturing plant in Pawtucket, which made electric bulbs. The photograph was one of many Rhode Island mill workers Hine chronicled for a national child welfare exhibit in 1912–1913. The sign atop the chest at left reads: “Johnson’s First Aid Cabinet ... Keep Locked.”



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