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Review Article

Eponymous dermatology: an overview

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Background of eponyms

In our daily lives, we frequently encounter places and things named after people. Streets, airports, and towns are often named after individuals. So are commonly used machines, such as the *diesel engine*, and clothing, such as the *mackintosh raincoat.* This form of naming honors a person who makes some contribution to our culture. The term used for a person so honored is "eponym." Thus, Rudolf Diesel is the eponym of the diesel engine. The term eponym is derived from the Greek words *epi,* meaning upon, and *onyma***,** meaning name.[1] Thus, an eponym is a person (real or fictitious) from whom something is said to take its name. Many of the eponyms used today have been introduced since the rise of modern science in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. But eponymy is an ancient practice. Some of the earliest recorded eponyms date from the first and second millennia BC, when the Assyrians named each calendar year after a high official.[2,3] The Greeks also named places after their heroes. In the sciences, eponymy is an old tradition. It often honors the discoverer of a law or theorem, as in *Newton's law of gravitation*; the describer of a new disease, as in *Addison's disease;* or the inventor of new equipment, as in the *Bunsen burner.* Scientists are far more frequently eponymized than humanities scholars. The *Eponyms Dictionaries Index (EDI),* edited by James A. Ruffner, Wayne State University Science Library, Detroit, Michigan, lists 20,000 eponyms overall, as well as 13,000 eponymized persons.[4] The number of eponyms in the *EDI* is so large because it includes many that are no longer capitalized. When an eponym is no longer capitalized, it's a sign that the term has been fully absorbed into everyday language. This is the ultimate attribute to the person eponymized. But by the time it occurs, the link between word and person is usually lost. Popular eponyms are like popular trademarks in this respect. Most people who are eponymized, are associated with only one eponym. But five or ten eponyms may be created in the wake of an eminent scientist. Better known scientists such as Albert Einstein and Isaac Newton have been identified with about 40 eponyms each. In medicine, the *Ulysses syndrome,*[5] describes the phenomenon of a doctor subjecting a healthy patient to a battery of unnecessary diagnostic tests, because of ideal test results outside the "normal" range. Like Ulysses, the patient ends up somewhat wome* for wear, after much fruitless exploration. The *Hermes syndrome,*[6] coined in response to medical journal editorials on theft from medical libraries, takes its name from the god of thieves.

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Eponyms and dermatology

Dermatology is known to be the discipline of medicine with most exuberant use of eponyms. Its lexicon is quite rich with descriptive terminologies including eponyms and toponyms which have been contributed by medical professionals as well as patients.

Contributors [7-10]

Both dermatologists and medical students have contributed greatly to the terminology used in dermatology. The meticulous observations of paramedical staff have made important contributions too, for example, Sister Mary Joseph's nodules. Moreover, some patients have also been immortalized by having their names or initials incorporated; for example, B-K mole syndrome, where the letters B and K refer to the two patients in whom the condition was first described. The same is true of anti-Sm, anti-La, and anti-Ro antibodies, each of which is derived from letters of a patient's name. A number of dermatological diagnoses, clinical signs, laboratory tests, histological features named after their contributors are given in **Tables 1-5** along with the countries of their origin.

Advantages of eponyms

1. Eponyms remind us that science and scholarship are the work of dedicated people. They allow us to immortalize sometimes obscure but deserving persons and are part of the reward system of science.

2. The use of an eponym may help us the lively history of dermatology.[11]

3. Use of eponym may also give a clue to the epidemiologic nature of the illness or represent a memorable incident.[12]

4. It is also a natural protection against plagiarism.[13]

5. They represent a natural language way of expressing complex ideas.

6. They have often been cited as a useful first approach to searching with title-word and citation indexes, as well as with controlled vocabularies where they are used.

7. Double and triple eponyms acknowledge researchers who were co-workers, as in *Chediak-Higashi syndrome.* This hereditary white blood cell disorder was described at about the same time by Chediak MM[14] in France and Higashi O in Japan.[15]

Disadvantages/limitations of eponyms

The rich eponymous vocabulary accumulated in dermatologic literature is subject to some limitations that determine its usage in the future and in spite of all the positive reasons for using eponyms, they do have some rather annoying features.

It is also said that "*When a disease is named after some author, it is very likely that we don't know much about it***".** (August Bier, 1861-1949)**.** Followings are certain limitations of using eponyms in dermatology field.

1. ***Redefinition of the terms***[10] Some of the eponyms are in Greek and Latin languages, which are not universally understood, and have ceased to be used even in the European countries from where they had originated. These Greco-Latin terms used in terminology need to be redefined now.

Table 1 Eponymous Clinical Diagnoses [7,10,12,17,21,23,26]

Eponymous names	*Description*	*Contributor*	*Country*
O'Brien granuloma	Actinic granuloma	O'Brien JP	Australia
Kaposi ,s sarcoma	Vascular tumour in immunodeficient/HIV-infected	Kaposi M	Austria
Kyrle's disease	Hyperkeratosis follicularis et parafollicularis in cutem penetrans	Kyrle J	Austria
Mucha's disease	Pityriasis lichenoides et varioliformis acuta (PLEVA)	Mucha V	Austria
von Zumbusch's disease	Generalized pustular psoriasis	Ritter von Zumbusch L	Austria
Anderson- Fabry's disease	Angiokeratoma corporis diffusum	Anderson W	U K
Brooke's tumour	Trichoepithelioma, epithelioma adenoids cysticum	Brooke HAG	U K
Dowling's disease	Reticulate pigmented anomaly of flexures, epidermolysis bullosa	Dowling GB	U K
Hartnup's disease	Inborn error of tryptophan excretion	Hartnup (Surname of the first family)	U K
Kindler's syndrome	Hereditary acrokeratotic poikiloderma	Kindler T (Female)	U K
Lyell's disease	Toxic epidermal necrolysis	Lyell A	U K
Pott's puffy tumour	Circumscribed swelling of the scalp with underlying osteomyelitis.	Pott P	UK
Rowell's syndrom	Erythema multiforme-like lesions in lupus erythematosus	Rowell NR	U K
Sneddon-Wilkinson 's disease	Subcorneal pustular dermatosis	Sneddon IB	U K
Sweet's syndrome	Acute febrile neutrophilic dermatosis	Sweet RD	U K
Wells's disease	Eosinophilic cellulites	Wells GC	U K
Wilkinson' disease (Sneddon-Wilkinson)	Subcorneal pustular dermatosis	Wilkinson DS	U K
Birt-Hogg-Dube syndrome	Hamartomas in patients with multiple fibrofolliculomas	Birt AR	Canada
Usher's (Senear-Usher's syndrome)	Pemphigus erythematosus	Usher BD	Canada
Bazin's disease	Nodular vasculitis	Bazin APE	France
Blum disease (Gouqerot-Blum, Schamberg's disease)	Pigmented purpuric dermatosis	Blum P	France
Chediak's disease (Chediak-Higashi syndrome)	Hypomelanosis, pyogenic infection, hepatosplenomegaly, neutro- and thrombocytopenia, immunodeficiency.	Chediak MM	France
Civatte's disease	Poikiloderma of Civatte	Civatte A	France
Darier's disease	Keratosis follicularis	Darier FJ	France
Favre-Racouchot's disease	Actinic degenerative changes	Favre MJ	France
Fournier's disease	Genital gangrene	Fournier JA	France
Gougerot's disease	Confluent and reticulate papillomatosis	Gougerot H	France
Hallopeau's disease	Acrodermatitis continua of Hallopeau, epidermolysis bullosa	Hallopeau FH	France
Jacquet dermatitis	Erosive irritant napkin dermatitis	Jacquet LML	France
Klippel-Trenaunay-Weber syndrome	Osteohypertrophic nevus flammeus	Klippel M	France
Woringer-Kolopp disease	Pagetoid reticulosis	Woringer F	France
Woringer-Kolopp disease	Pagetoid reticulosis	Kolopp P	France
Laugier's disease	Freckling of oral mucosa and melanonychia	Laugier P	France

Cont…

Eponymous names	*Description*	*Contributor*	*Country*
Lefevre's keratoderma (Papillon-Lefevre'syndrome)	Palmoplantar keratoderma	Lefevre P	France
Favre-Racouchot's disease	Solar degenerative elastosis	Racouchot J	France
Langerhans cell histiocytosis	Rare systemic infiltrative disorder in children with skin involvement	Langerhans P	Germany
Münchhausen's syndrome	Name of a syndrome with pretensions	Baron Münchhausen HKFF (A Soldier)	Germany
Buschke-Lowenstein's tumour	Giant genital wart, Giant chondyloma	Buschke A	Germany
Buscke-Ollendorff syndrome	Symmetrical flesh-coloured indurated papular eruption on trunk and extremities	Buschke A	Germany
Buschke's disease I	Hard nonpitting oedema in females, usually preceded by a febrile disease	Buschke A	Germany
Fabry's disease	Angiokeratoma corporis diffusum		
Greither's disease	Progressive palmoplantar keratoderma	Greither A	Germany
Habermann's disease	Pityriasis lichenoides et varioliformis acuta (PLEVA)	Habermann R	Germany
Jadassohn's disease	Congenital pachonychia congenita	Jadassohn J	Germany
Vohwinkel's syndrome	Mutilating keratoderma	Vohwinkel KH	Germany
Zinsser's disease	Dyskeratosis congenita	Zinsser F	Germany
Nekam's disease	Keratosis lichenoides chronica	Nekam LA	Hungry
Crosti's disease, (Gianotti-Crosti syndrome)	Infantile papular acrodermatitis	Crosti A	Italy
Gianotti's disease (Gianotti-Crosti syndrome)	Infantile papular acrodermatitis	Gianotti F	Italy
Mibelli's porokeratosis	Porokeratosis	Mibelli V	Italy
Mibelli's angiokeratoma	Angiokeratoma,	Mibelli V	Italy
Pasini's disease	Epidermolysis bullosa (Italy)	Pasini A	Italy
Higashi's disease (Chediak-Higashi syndrome)	Hypomelanosis, pyogenic infection, hepatosplenomegaly, neutro- and thrombopenia, and immunodeficiency.	Chediak MM	France
Ito nevus	Nevus of Ito	Ito M	Japan
Kawasaki'disease	Mucocutaneous lymph node syndrome	Kawasaki T	Japan
Ofuji's disease	Eosinophilic pustular folliculitis	Ofuji S	Japan
Ota nevus	Nevus of Ota	Ota MT	Japan
Takayasu's disease	Arteritis	Takayasu M	Japan
Boeck's disease	Sarcoidosis	Boeck CPR	Norway
Hansen's disease	Leprosy (Norway)	Hansen GHA	Norway
Shabbir's syndrome	Laryngo-onycho-cutaneous syndrome	Shabbir G	Pakistan
Barton's disease	Oroya fever, bartonellosis	Barton AL	Peru
Carrion's disease	Oroya fever, verruga	Carrion DA (Medical student)	Peru
Hunziker's syndrome	Freckling of oral mucosa and melanonychia	Hunziker N	Switzerland
Behcet's disease	Uveitis, recurrent mucosal ulceration of mouth, pharynx, and genitalia	Behcet H	Turkey
Albright's syndrome	Polystotic fibrous dysplasia, café-au-lait pigmentation, endocrine disorders.	Albright M	USA
Becker's nevus	Hairy nevus	Becker SW	USA
Bloom's syndrome	Congenital syndrome	Bloom P	USA
Bowen's diseas	Carcinoma in situ	Bowen JT	USA
Duhring's disease	Dermatitis herpetiformis	Duhring L	USA
Fox's disease (Fox-Fordyce's disease)	Apocrine acne	Fox GH	USA

Eponymous names	*Description*	*Contributor*	*Country*
Goltz's syndrome	Focal dermal hypoplasia	Goltz RW	USA
Grover's disease	Transient acantholytic dermatosis	Grover RW	USA
Hailey's (Hailey-Hailey's disease)	Vesiculo-bullous disorder	Hailey HE	USA
Hailey's (Hailey-Hailey's disease)	Vesiculo-bullous disorder	Hailey WH	USA
Jessner's diseas (Jessner-Kanof syndrome)	Lymphocytic infiltration of skin	Jessner M	USA
Kanof' disease (Jessner-Kanof syndrome)	Lymphocytic infiltration of skin	Kanof NB	USA
Klinefelter's syndrome	Male karyotype with extra X chromosome	Klinefelter HF (Medical student)	USA
Netherton's syndrome	Ichthyosis linearis circumflexa	Netherton EW	USA
Pinkus tumour	Fibroepithelial tumor	Pinkus HKB	USA
Ricketts typhus	Investigated typhus	Ricketts HT (Pathologist)	USA
Senear's (Senear-Usher's syndrome)	Pemphigus erythematosus	Senear FE	USA
Schamberg's disease	Pigmented purpuric dermatosis	Schamberg JF	USA
Spitz's nevus	Nevus in children	Spitz S (Woman)	USA
Sutton's nevus	Halo nevus, recurrent oral ulcers	Sutton RL	USA
Torre's disease	Sebaceous gland tumors with multiple internal malignancies	Torre DP	USA
Weary's disease	Acrokeratotic poikiloderma	Weary PE	USA
Winer's diseas	Winer's dilated pore	Winer L	USA
Solomon's syndrome	Brittle hair with teeth, hairs and nail anomalies (Yogoslavia)	Solomon T	USA
Urbach-Wiethe disease	Hyalinosis cutis et mucosae (lipoid proteinosis)	Urbach E	USA

2. ***Inaccuracy in eponyms***[16] Some eponymous clinical signs may at times be inaccurate, as seen in the sign of Leser-Trélat because both Edmund Leser and Ulysse Trélat were examining cherry angiomas in patients with cancer. The association between internal cancer and seborrheic keratosis was actually first linked by Hollander in 1900 and not by Edmund Leser or Ulysse Trélat.

3. ***Misnomers***[12,17,18] A significant number of conditions previously described have been labeled as misnomers because their meanings have not appropriately conveyed the main features of the disease. This is bound to happen with the development of better methods of investigation and fresh insights; but long tradition and frequent usage have sometimes bestowed a sanctity that justifies their continued usage. For example, acanthosis nigricans is a clinical description of a lesion that shows a papillomatous appearance and not a histologic derivation, as the term may well imply; histologically there is neither acanthosis nor is the melanin deposition greatly altered, as the term would suggest.

4. ***Misleading eponyms***[12,16,18] When naming clinical signs eponymously, the name of the person may have been coined more than once, e.g., Hutchinson's sign, which can be seen both in subungual melanoma and ophthalmic herpes zoster. In such situations it is better to be more specific by adding the site of involvement when mentioning the sign, e.g. Hutchinson's nail sign or Hutchinson's zoster sign.

Table 2 Eponymous clinical signs and phenomenon [7,10,12,17,21,26]

Clinical signs/ phenomenon	*Description*	*Contributors*	*Country*
Blaschko's lines	Embryological cleavage lines	Blaschko A	Germany
Gottron's papules	Erythema over the interpalanged joints of the hands in dermatomyositis	Gottron HA	Germany
Koebner's phenomenon	Diagnostic test in psoriasis	Koebner H	Germany
Dennie-Morgan folds	Fold in atopic dermatitis	Dennie CC	USA
Fordyce's spots	Apocrine acne	Fordyce JA	USA
Mary Joseph's nodules	Described umbilical metastases from internal tumor	Mary Joseph (Sister)	USA
Darier's sign	Urticarial blister formation at the site of friction in urticaria pigmentosa	Darier FJ	French
Nikolsky's sign	Exfoliation of peripheral skin around blister produced by sliding pressure, initially seen in chronic form of symmetrical pemphigus.	Nikolsky PV	Russia
Hutchinson's sign,	Can be seen ophthalmic herpes zoster	Hutchinson J	UK
Hutchinson's nail sign	Can be seen in subungual melanoma	Hutchinson J	UK
Hutchinson's triad	Hutchinson's teeth, interstitial keratosis, and deafness	Hutchinson J	UK
Hutchinson's teeth	Pegged and notched incisors seen in congenital syphilis	Hutchinson J	UK
Hutchinson's summer prurigo	Nodular and papular, pruritic, urticarialike lesions on sun exposed parts of the body.	Hutchinson J	UK
Hutchinson's freckle	A precancerous condition occurring chiefly during middle and old age	Hutchinson J	UK
Hutchinson's patch	Salmon-coloured area in the cornea seen in syphilitic keratitis.	Hutchinson J	UK
Hutchinson's facies	A peculiar, rigid facial expression with unmoving eyes.	Hutchinson J	UK
Hutchinson's mask	Paraesthesia in tabes.	Hutchinson J	UK
Leser-Trélat sign	Association between internal cancer and seborrheic keratosis	Edmund Leser Ulysse Trélat	Germany France

Table3 Eponymous laboratory tests/organisms [7,12,21,26]

Lab tests/organisms	*Description*	*Contributors*	*Country*
Fernandez reaction	Delayed type hypersensitivity (lepromin test in leprosy)	Fernandez JMM	Argentina
Jarish (Jarisch-Herxheimer reaction)	Exacerbation when an infectious disease is treated with a potent antimicrobial agent	Jarisch A	Austria
Donovan bodies	Organisms in granuloma inguinale and leishmaniasis	Donovan C	UK
Ducrey (*Hemophilus ducrey*)	Organism causing chancroid	Ducrey A	Italy
Mitsuda's reaction	Lepromin test with heat-killed bacilli	Mitsuda K	Japan
Herxheimer (Jarisch-Herxheimer reaction)	Reaction as described by Jarisch (Austria)	Herxheimer K	Germany

5. ***Names of places***[19] These too may lend themselves to doubts. Tangier disease, supposedly named after Tangier Island near Chesapeake Bay in the United States, may be mistaken for the summer capital of Morocco, which is also Tangier.

Table 4 Eponymous histological diagnosis [7,12,26]

Histological features	*Description*	*Contributors*	*Country*
Kogoj's pustules	Pustules in psoriasis	Kogoj F	Yogoslavia
Langerhans 'cells	Dendritic, dopa-negative clear cells (macrophages)	Langerhans P	Germany
Munro's abcess	Munro's abscess	Munro J	Australia
Pautrier's microabcess	Eosinophil-rich pleomorphic intradermal infiltration with focal collections of reticular cells	Pautrier LM	French
Russell's bodies	Small spherical hyaline bodies in inflammatory growth (Rhinoscleroma, degenerating plasma cells	Russell W	Scottish
Unna's cells	Russell's bodies	Russell W	Scottish

Table 5 Miscellaneous [7,12,26]

Miscellaneous	*Description*	*Contributors*	*Country*
Wood's lamp	Wood's lamp	Wood RW (Physicist)	USA
Whitfield's ointment	Ointment used to treat ringworm	Whitfield A	UK
Sabouraud's media	Culture media for dermatophytes	Sabouraud RJA	France
Nicot	Tobacco used in various products, Introduced by a diplomat	Nicot J (French diplomate, ambassador in Portugal)	France

6. ***Mythology***[20] When probed, mythologic stories may also have been misinterpreted. The story of Job suggests that when all the clinical manifestations were taken into consideration, the signs and symptoms pointed to arsenic poisoning, supporting the evidence of arsenic being used as a poison from biblical times. However, the term Job's syndrome is currently used for a subset of patients with hyper-eosinophilic syndrome.

7. ***Synonyms posing problems***[12] A difficult situation may arise when the disease may have more than one eponym and the student may not get desirous information about a particular disorder, e.g., lipoid proteinosis, which is also known as Urbach-Wiethe disease and hyalinosis cutis et mucosae. A person unaware of all these names is unlikely to get complete information about this condition for the matter may be accessible in one name only. Similarly, Klippel-Trenaunay-Weber syndrome and Klippel-Trenaunay-Weber-Parkes syndrome are essentially the same and both refer to osteohypertrophic nevus flammeus. The names Weber and Weber-Parkes refer to the same person.

8. ***Ambiguity***[21,2] Some eponyms can be ambiguous and may even be considered homographs. These include *Pott's disease, Pott's fracture, Pott's gangren,* and *Pott's puffy tumor.* No doubt these eponyms are occasionally confused with each other. Even worse are the cases of eponymy where only a number distinguishes different diseases, as in *Albright's syndrome (1), Albright's syndrome (2), Albright's syndrome (3),* and *Albright's syndrome (4).* Double and triple eponyms also exist, and these can be unwieldy. Sometimes a double eponym denotes a full name, as in the *Austin Flint murmur* in cardiology.

9. ***Multiple eponymy***[2] presumably, multiple eponyms provide a kind of sharing credit among scientists but it is done at the cost of

conciseness, e.g., the quadruple eponym Charcot-Marie-Tooth-Hoffmann syndrome is more cumbersome than the descriptive term of "neuropathic muscular atrophy". With the current trend toward team research, multiple eponymy could become even more awkward, What if every member of a five- or six-person research team were included in an eponym? An alternative might be to use some kind of team name such as the Framingham study.

10. ***Wrong attribution***[12] Some eponyms do not reward the isolated achievement of an original discoverer, because they are usually wrongly attributed and for such eponyms one or more of the following four statements is likely to be true: the eponymized person wasn't the first describer of the discovery; the eponymized person didn't correctly understand the discovery; the eponym's current meaning differs greatly from the original idea; or the attribution has no historical basis whatsoever.

11. ***Indexing problem***[21] The traditional indexing services deal with eponyms in a variety of ways. If the eponym is a commonly used term, it may be an authorized search term. Otherwise, it may be cross-referenced with an authorized search term. But sometimes it's neither. For example, *Index Medicus* doesn't use *Sweet's syndrome* as either a subject heading *or* a cross-reference.

12. ***Incorrect spellings and mis-pronounciation***[12,18,24,25] Problems that might be encountered due to inaccurate transliteration - like what happened to Nikolskiy when it was translated from the Cyrillic alphabet to other languages. Also, when naming clinical signs eponymously, it is important to remember that a name may be used more than once and that the eponym may be misleading or inaccurate. An example of the latter is Pautrier microabscesses (first described by Darier). According to a pupil, Pautrier himself expressed surprise that he was given credit for Darier's contribution.

Conclusion

Dermatologic terms named aptly in any suitable way are here to stay with us and have certainly captured the minds of the beginners in enabling a better comprehension of the subject. It is not possible to remember all the names given to a particular condition. Simplifying names and rendering them more meaningful is a continuous process that has to proceed along with advances made in the science of dermatology.

Whatever disadvantages eponyms may have, they are outweighed by their benefits. They allow us to immortalize sometimes obscure but deserving persons. In fact, it is believed that the use of an eponym never fails to remind us of the lively history of dermatology

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