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The Etymological Roots of the Specialties

STANLEY M. ARONSON, MD

A SURGEON, ETYMOLOGICALLY, IS A PRACTITIONER WHO DOES HEALING work with his hands; as opposed to one who achieves healing solely with pharmaceuticals. The ancient Greek term, *kheirurgia* defined someone who worked by hand, and resulted from the merger of *kheir* (meaning hand), and *ergon*, (meaning work.) An older English title for a surgeon, accordingly, was *chirurgion*. (And a *chiromancer* is a palmist for foresees the future; while a *chiropractor* is one who treats disease by manual manipulation.)

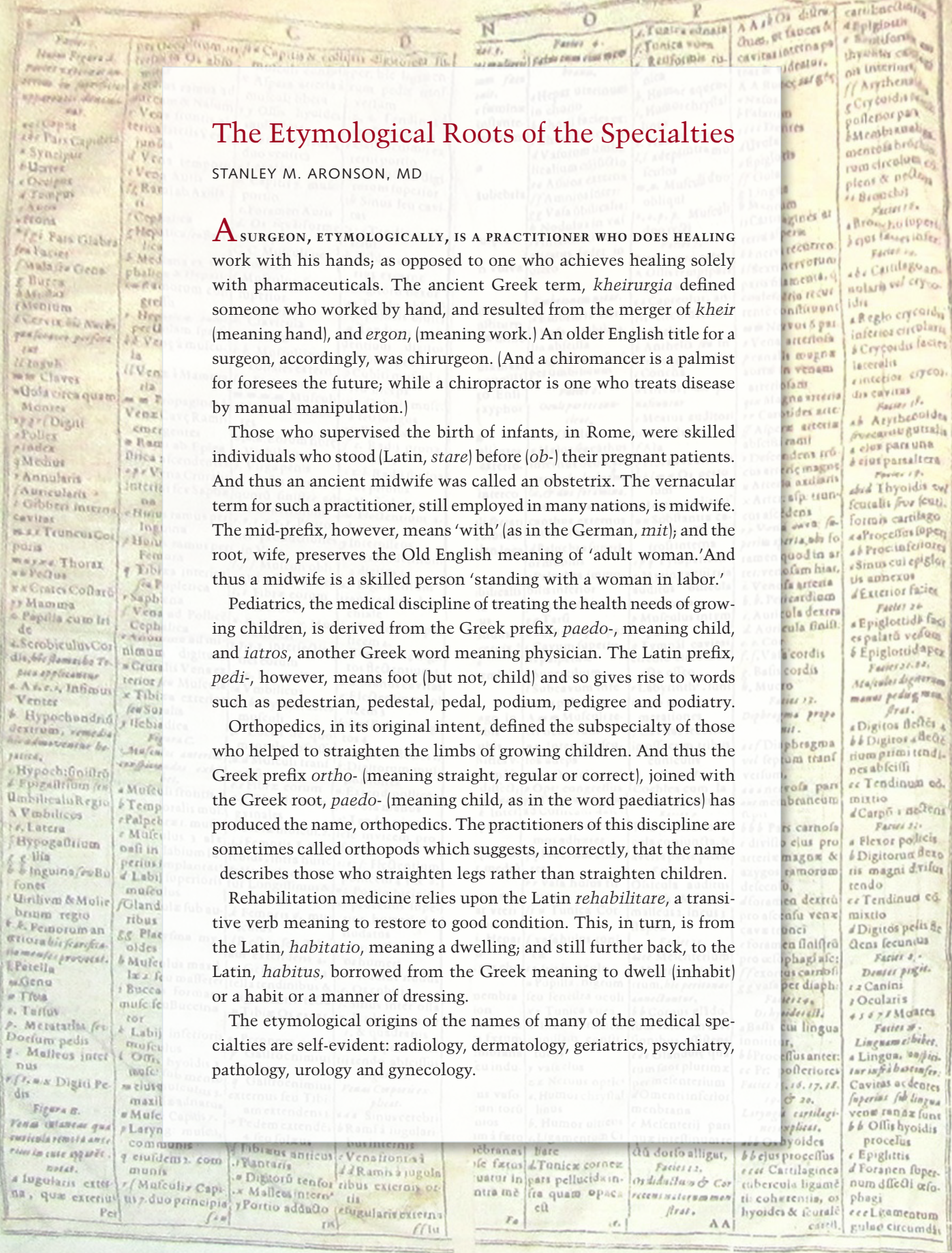
Those who supervised the birth of infants, in Rome, were skilled individuals who stood (Latin, *stare*) before (*ob-*) their pregnant patients. And thus an ancient midwife was called an *obstetrix*. The vernacular term for such a practitioner, still employed in many nations, is *midwife*. The *mid-* prefix, however, means 'with' (as in the German, *mit*); and the root, *wife*, preserves the Old English meaning of 'adult woman.' And thus a midwife is a skilled person 'standing with a woman in labor.'

Pediatrics, the medical discipline of treating the health needs of growing children, is derived from the Greek prefix, *paedo-*, meaning child, and *iatros*, another Greek word meaning physician. The Latin prefix, *pedi-*, however, means foot (but not, child) and so gives rise to words such as *pedestrian*, *pedestal*, *pedal*, *podium*, *pedigree* and *podiatry*.

Orthopedics, in its original intent, defined the subspecialty of those who helped to straighten the limbs of growing children. And thus the Greek prefix *ortho-* (meaning straight, regular or correct), joined with the Greek root, *paedo-* (meaning child, as in the word *paediatrics*) has produced the name, *orthopedics*. The practitioners of this discipline are sometimes called *orthopods* which suggests, incorrectly, that the name describes those who straighten legs rather than straighten children.

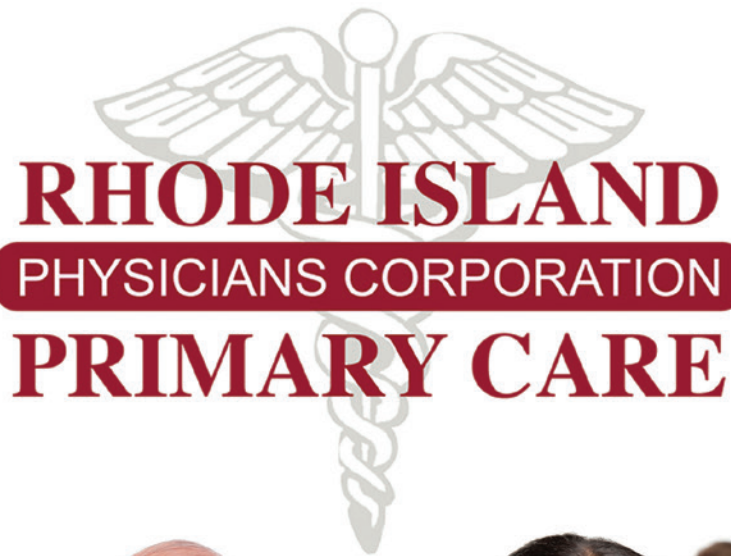
Rehabilitation medicine relies upon the Latin *rehabilitare*, a transitive verb meaning to restore to good condition. This, in turn, is from the Latin, *habitatio*, meaning a dwelling; and still further back, to the Latin, *habitus*, borrowed from the Greek meaning to dwell (inhabit) or a habit or a manner of dressing.

The etymological origins of the names of many of the medical specialties are self-evident: radiology, dermatology, geriatrics, psychiatry, pathology, urology and gynecology.



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Original Articles

The Treatment of Chronic Cardiac Affections, with Special Emphasis Upon Diet Therapy*

By G. CARROLL SMITH, M. D.,
BOSTON, MASS.

Probably the two best cardiac tonics in our hands to-day are digitalis and opium, as they both slow the heart's action and strengthen the systole. Digitalis also acts in many instances as a diuretic, and is therefore clearly indicated in dilatation, slight or marked, with great exhaustion, and remember you may have great exhaustion with very little, as well as with great dilatation, because the exhaustion is due to the impairment of heart muscle affected, hence if there remains sufficient muscle intact to make itself known by increasing tone seen in the character of the pulse, the digitalis will be useful, otherwise not, and this undoubtedly explains the failure of this drug in so many instances, rather than the quality of it, though this may be at times the cause. I have for some time used the leaves prepared by Caesar & Loretz, of Germany, and it makes little difference whether one uses the infusion, tincture or the pills. They are all reliable, and when carefully used do not seem to irritate the stomach. I find it much stronger than that of Park, Davis & Co., and use not more than five drops of the tincture to begin with. An effect of digitalis often noticed by Cushing and Mackenzie, after using it a few days, is the nodal rhythm is established and the pause between the ventricular systoles is much prolonged. This, of course, is an indication to discontinue its use. Moreover, Mackenzie always stops it when the pulse rate drops one per minute, as he says further reduction will take place. In cases when it has no effect it should, of course, not be used. It may often be combined with squills and calomel to enhance their diuretic effect. The clearest indication for its use is cardiac exhaustion, accompanied with dilatation, scanty urine with high gravity and usually albu-

100 Years Ago: Digitalis, Opium as Adjunct Therapy in Treating Heart Disease

This excerpt is from an article on the treatment of heart disease which appeared in the January 1914 issue of *The Providence Medical Journal*. The author writes in the article: "Opium is a very valuable heart tonic by virtue of its quieting effect on the nervous system and its slowing the heart and increasing the force of the systole. ... When given by mouth, only pleasant preparations should be selected, like McMunn's elixir of opium." He recommended that it may be given "at bedtime in doses of fifteen to twenty-five minims, or five to ten minims t.i.d."

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2. In its effects, the Elixir is more characteristic, permanent and uniform than any of the artificial compounds of Morphine.
3. And as a Preparation, it is not liable to decompose or deteriorate like the Solutions of Morphine: and thus is obviated a serious objection, which has prevented the latter from being used with precision and effect.

To speak summarily, the Elixir of Opium, as a remedy, may be adopted in all cases in which either Opium or its preparations are administered, with the certainty of obtaining all their salutary and happy effects, without being followed by their distressing and pernicious consequences.

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This print from 1737 by Elizabeth Blackwell in England shows the flower, fruit and seed of a foxglove plant, from which digitalis was derived.