

Patients want their doctors

In response to the editorial¹ by Dr S.L. Librach, "Role of family physicians in end-of-life care," I can only quote a patient that I saw recently: "I don't want some stranger looking after me when I'm dying; I want *my* doctor!"

—Blair Pierce, MD, CCFP
London, Ont
by e-mail

Reference

1. Librach SL. Role of family physicians in end-of-life care. Rhetoric, role, and reality [editorial]. *Can Fam Physician* 2001;47:1941-3 (Eng), 1949-51 (Fr).

Academic family medicine a lot like yeast

I must respond to the letter¹ by Dr Tim McDowell, who thinks that the attitude of academic family medicine^{2,3} is divisive and elitist and alienates "on-the-ground" family physicians. He then suggests that the definition of family medicine should be broadened and become inclusive.

Although I wholeheartedly support the latter idea, I think that academic family medicine is like yeast in dough: if it serves to make us think about what we do, then it is serving one of its functions. Change is difficult for all of us, and it is easy to blame the agent fermenting that change. I suggest that the perception of academic family medicine as divisive or elitist is an unwarranted side effect. And, as such, the charge should be disregarded.

I suspect that, in the end, we are defined by what we do and not by our label. I appreciate that politicians and health care planners need definitions of family medicine and primary care, as well as population predictions. Family physicians with an academic interest must contribute to this important decision making.

Other family physicians, whatever their interest, can contribute to this debate, and it would be foolhardy to ignore their opinions.

—Nick Unsworth, MA, MB, CCFP, MRCP
Liphook, United Kingdom
by fax

References

1. McDowell T. Aren't we all family physicians? [letter]. *Can Fam Physician* 2001;47:2209.
2. McWhinney IR. Time, change, and family practice [editorial]. *Can Fam Physician* 2001;47:1365-7 (Eng), 1374-6 (Fr).
3. Katz A. Definition lacks clarity [letter]. *Can Fam Physician* 2001;47:1721.

Symbols and spellings in our December issue

I was pleased and interested in reading the article¹ by Walter Rosser in December's issue of *Canadian Family Physician* to see two inspiring physicians recognized for their extraordinary work and dedication. I was perplexed, however, by the cover, and went to my new *Collins English Dictionary* (Millennium Edition), which my wife gave me as a Christmas gift, for help. Yup! The plural of hero is "heroes."

I then asked my wife whether the plural of potato ends in "s" or "es." She replied that it is "es," and as always, she was right. This got me wondering. Do all English words that end in "o" become pluralized by adding "es"? My wife suggested "inferno." Collins English Dictionary states that the plural is "infernos." Hmm. I decided to check "imbroglio." The plural is "imbroglios."

So, after this exhaustive search, what are we to conclude? Fifty percent of English words ending in "o" require "es" to form the plural, and 50% simply add "s"? Or is it more accurate to say that English words beginning with "i" and ending in "o" require "s" to form the plural and all others require "es"? I think there could be a problem here with "sampling bias," and I suspect the only firm conclusion that one can draw

from this data is the ever-popular "more research is needed!"

—Jeff Sloan, MD, CCFP
Napane, Ont
by e-mail

Reference

1. Rosser WW. Heros [Reflections]. *Can Fam Physician* 2001;47:2463-4.

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I read with interest the Reflections article "Heros"¹ in the December issue of *Canadian Family Physician*.

I was rather upset, however, with the cover of that issue. Instead of the staff of Aesculapius it showed the staff of Hermes, the god of merchants and thieves.

—A.J. Verster, MD, CCFP
Beamsville, Ont
by e-mail

Reference

1. Rosser WW. Heros [Reflections]. *Can Fam Physician* 2001;47:2463-4.

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How could a reputable medical journal like *Canadian Family Physician* print on its December 2001 cover the staff of Hermes, the messenger of the gods (two snakes) instead of the staff of Aesculapius (one snake), which I am sure was intended.

At first I thought this might be an article about the US Army Medical Corps, who have perpetuated this error. But no, the article was about Canadian doctors.

Then, to top it, you misspelled the English plural of "hero." It should be "heroes" with an "e."

Where was your proofreader this month?

—Mary Sidgwick, MB, CCFP
Don Mills, Ont
by mail

Response

We understand that our December cover has caused disquiet among