

What's in a name? (A rose would smell so sweet)

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I recently bumped into the editor of this august journal and he reminded me he had, with his wife's connivance, changed the title of one of my earlier stories from 'A winter's tale' to 'Chilly ... con Carne'.⁽¹⁾ Now, whenever I submit an article I am honoured with this title!

You will know that 'carne' in Italian, or Spanish, means 'meat' or 'flesh', so that when we holiday in those countries, our name occasions frequent hilarity! This set me to thinking of many instances when names become the centre of various medical tales. Here are just a few ...

I was appointed medical registrar at Royal Lancaster Infirmary in March 1960, and usually dined in the juniors' mess room. In those days, all juniors had to take turns in the Casualty Dept. Mr Kitchin was the senior orthopaedic surgeon and as such in charge of Casualty. He was angered by the illegible handwriting of some juniors and objected strongly to the use of abbreviations such as CVS, NAD. Thus he composed a letter, addressed to the juniors, forbidding such unacceptable behaviour in patients' notes. It was typed by his secretary and signed by him, then pinned up on the notice board in the mess room. After two days, some wag had drawn an arrow to the signature asking, 'WHO?'

Another story concerns the same consultant. A sailing dinghy was acquired by the hospital authorities for the use of medical staff and it was moored at Windermere. One Wednesday, when several of us were off duty, we headed up to the boat. There we spent a long time rigging it, had about 20 minutes sailing and an endless time unrigging the vessel. Inevitably, the return journey through slow-moving traffic meant we were back late in the mess and there was no food left. With hunger pangs striking us all, the leader of our venture, the surgical registrar, one Mr Rana Singh (later to become professor of surgery in Delhi), angrily grabbed the 'phone and demanded to be put through to the KITCHEN. 'Vere is all the food? Ve are all very hungry!' He was answered by a gentle male voice – 'Mr Kitchin, speaking,' from his home. 'If you are all so hungry come to my house and we'll give you something to eat.' I am afraid the end of this story is not clear in my mind, but I'm sure we were well fed that evening.

You may have read in this journal about 'blepharospasm and Meige's Syndrome', from which I continue to suffer.⁽²⁾ After a variety of treatments, the only one that helps me slightly is botulinum toxin injections around the eyes every 3-4 months. For these, I had to travel to either Oxford or Manchester. To lessen these longish journeys, my general practitioner (GP)

kindly referred me to neurology in Preston. There, my wife and I waited patiently in outpatients and were eventually ushered into the neurologist's consulting room. I was taken aback as I was rather curtly assailed with, 'Who are you? Why are you here? We have no notes on you, do we sister? Well, you had better tell me what's wrong with you!' At this stage, the nursing sister took some notes to my wife asking, 'Is this him?' 'Yes,' she answered. From that moment the consultation became much more pleasant and I was given several injections in an expert manner. On the way home, my wife questioned me about why I thought I had been addressed so aggressively. I said I had no idea. 'They couldn't find your notes because they were looking for Dr Khan with dark skin and an Asian accent.' Oh, how names play tricks!

I thank goodness I did not inherit names such as 'Smellie' or 'Hiscock!' It has been reported that one family had the surname 'Elizabeth' and named their daughter 'Queenie'. Just think about that! At least one of my sons was universally known at school as 'Genghis'.

I did my National Service as a medical officer in Malaya, spending some time as a junior house officer in a British military hospital.⁽³⁾ On ward rounds, I was expected to present the new patients' histories and clinical findings. The consultant, who was a Major and a big jovial person, always at the end of my spiel delighted in teasing me by asking, 'Are you positive Khan?' (One of the tests then for syphilis!) We were all expected to laugh at this joke!

In my work as a GP, I was always well supported by my partners, one of whom was Dr Frankland. I returned home on one occasion from holiday and was strolling into town when a lady patient spotted me. She was a simple soul and interrupted my walk with, 'Doctor did you know our Martin died when you was away, and I had to call that Dr Frankenstein?' What a monstrous mistake!

I'm sure most who have read my rambling anecdotes will have similar stories to tell. Why not share a few with our Editor. Severn will do!

REFERENCES

1. Carne J. Chilly ... con Carne. MBMJ 2011;6(4):105
2. Carne J. 'Physician, heal thyself!' – benign essential blepharospasm. MBMJ 2008;5(8):236-7
3. Carne J. A tale from Malaya. MBMJ 2010;6(3):92