

BRITISH MEDICAL JOURNAL

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We may return unduly long letters to the author for shortening so that we can offer readers as wide a selection as possible. We receive so many letters each week that we have to omit some of them. Letters must be signed personally by all their authors. We cannot acknowledge their receipt unless a stamped addressed envelope or an international reply coupon is enclosed.

Correspondents should present their references in the Vancouver style (see examples in these columns). In particular, the names and initials of all authors must be given unless there are more than six, when only the first three should be given, followed by *et al*; and the first and last page numbers of articles and chapters should be included. Titles of papers are not, however, included in the correspondence section.

Aquagenic pruritus

SIR,—I approve Dr R H Hardy's (25 July, p 310) adverse criticism concerning the etymologically ugly neologism "aquagenic" created by my otherwise most learned of dermatological heroes, Professor M W Greaves and Dr R A J Eady; and, with Dr Hardy, I would applaud their nosological enterprise, despite their having spawned a hybrid classical monster in the course of their investigations. But the humanities can provide a humane killer.

These authors (20 June, p 2008; 25 July, p 310), I know, were subjected to instruction in the classical tongues and as their contemporary I am aware that buckets of *aqua* indeed have flowed past in the intervening years. None the less, study of well-established "English" words with the suffix -genic and -genous makes it clear that they should not

adopt Dr Hardy's "hydrogenic." This would dub it a piddling disorder, too wishy-washy a malady for such great persons to have brought forth. "Genic" means "producing or giving rise to"; whereas "hydrogenous" might be closer to their intentions with a meaning "produced by or arising from" water.

In like manner, it troubles me when someone kills my word "iatrogenous"—that is, physician generated—for "iatrogenic," which, if this word obeys these rules, implies something that "gives rise to doctors." Do I interpret that the authors in their reply to Dr Hardy (when they refer darkly to "educational trends in medicine being what they are") are rueing the lack of funds to generate technically excellent physicians or are they harping back to their own school days and seeing that nowadays education is producing and giving rise to a profession

with a new unlearnedness in the humanities? A liberal profession still, but no longer learned?

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SIR,—Is it really justifiable for Professor M W Greaves and Dr R A J Eady (25 July, p 310) to defend the use of the term aquagenic (on the grounds that they have forgotten their early education) by demonstrating their deficiency not only in classical but also in historical knowledge? King Canute deliberately demonstrated to his servile courtiers that their flattery was undeserved by proving to them that he could not command the waves.

Dr Routh's well-known advice applies even