



DUNCAN SMITH

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EDITOR'S CHOICE

What's in a name?

Once you start down the road of identifying aggravations it's hard to stop. How about medical students?

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The surnames of urologists Splatt and Weedon¹ first alerted doctors to the delights of nominative determinism, described by Wikipedia as the theory that a person's name can have a significant role in determining key aspects of their job, profession, or even character. Hours of harmless fun have followed, as specialty lists have been pored over in search of names that fit the job.

Going one step further, might people's names be a clue to their illnesses? John Keaney and colleagues found that having the surname Brady increased the risk of bradycardia serious enough to warrant pacemaker insertion (p 18). If their findings can be generalised beyond bradycardia among the Bradys of Dublin then we might be on the verge of a genuine medical breakthrough.

Even if it turns out to be a dead end, the temptations of nominative determinism are hard to resist. Among this year's Christmas articles, I discover that Holly Cakebread is a coauthor of a study of the survival time of sweets on wards (p 14), and I found myself negotiating over semi-miraculous births in Catalonia with a man called Jesus (p 8).

Religion gets more exposure this year than usual, although not everyone may be happy about that (pp 5, 6). Unlike religion, animal work and poetry are routinely excluded from the journal because we're frightened of opening the floodgates. (More people want to write poetry than read it. Discuss.) Last year we dipped our toe in the water with a research article on the nasal vasculature of Rudolf the red nosed reindeer (which turned out to be the best read article in the Christmas issue). And this year we jumped in possibly over our heads—with a 36 000 kg humpback whale, which was fortunately and unfortunately dead at the time (p 20). This year's

poems are not just any old poems, but haikus, and we commissioned them (p 22).

The last section of the journal is called Aggravations and the articles selected themselves for inclusion. There should be something for everybody, whether it's obstructive colleagues (p 41), faulty surgical equipment (p 41), or phoning a patient's GP (p 42).

Like the quest for examples of nominative determinism, once you start down the road of identifying aggravations it's hard to stop. How about medical students? Putting in a nightshift as a hospital porter, professor of surgery Ara Darzi was told by one third year student: "You grab the feet and pull . . . then go up to the ward and bring down the next patient, and hurry . . . it's because of you this list is running behind" (p 24).

Or showbiz celebrities pontificating about health (p 36)? Or even, as the festive season rolls on, your domestic partner? Husband and wife Bruce Arroll and Felicity Goodyear-Smith participated in a study of whether it was better to be right or happy. It did not go well, and the data monitoring committee had to call a halt (p 11).

There are aggravations about the Christmas issue itself—that there's only one a year and that the deadline for submissions is even earlier than the appearance of Christmas decorations on British high streets. Next year it's 15 September. And remember, without your articles, it's nothing.

Tony Delamothe, deputy editor, *BMJ*
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¹ Splatt AJ, Weedon D. The urethral syndrome: experience with the Richardson urethroplasty. *Br J Urol* 1977;49:173-6.

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Returning from a break?

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