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The women behind the names: Dermatology eponyms named after women☆,☆☆

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Introduction

Eponymous conditions are common in medicine, making it an interesting area of study to discover the people responsible for describing diseases and their characteristics. Diseases are not only named after the researchers who identified them but sometimes the patients themselves. Eponyms are slowly being dropped from dermatology as improvements in our understanding lead to improvements in nomenclature and classification. This article will discuss some of the women who are immortalized in dermatology textbooks by the diseases that bear their names. We have concentrated on dermatology conditions and so have not included such famous physicians and researchers as Cornelia de Lange, Jacqueline Noonan, or Mary Frances Lyon.

Dermatologists

Helen Ollendorff-Curth (1899-1982) was a German-Jewish dermatologist who later practiced in the United States (Davies and Yesudian, 2014). She was born in Breslau, Germany, and graduated from medical school in 1923 (Al Aboud and Al Aboud, 2011). Her name initially became synonymous with the now rarely-used test, the "Ollendorff probe sign," after demonstrating in her thesis that the lesions of secondary syphilis are exquisitely sensitive to touch. She studied with Professor Abraham Buschke in Berlin from 1924 onwards, describing Buschke–Ollendorff syndrome (Buschke and Ollendorff, 1928), also known as disseminated dermatofibrosis, a rare autosomal dominant disorder that can be associated with osteopoikilosis. She met and married Wilhelm Curth, another dermatologist, in Berlin, but after witnessing the rise of anti-Semitism and violence, they emigrated to New York with their child and worked for Columbia University. Buschke did not survive the Nazism in Germany, dying in a concentration camp (Shipman, 2015). Under her married name, Ollendorff published widely, particularly on acanthosis nigricans (Curth, 1943, 1976), leading to the creation of the Curth's criteria for the diagnosis of paraneoplastic acanthosis nigricans (see Table 1; Bolognia et al., 2003). She also described ichthyosis hystrix with Madge Macklin, also known as Curth–Macklin ichthyosis (Curth and Macklin, 1954), although this is now termed a nonsyndromic minor variant of the keratinopathic ichthyoses caused by autosomal dominant mutations in keratin 1 (Oji et al., 2010). Curth continued to work until in her 70s, but developed dementia; after her death, she donated her brain for research.

Nancy Burton Esterly is an American pediatric dermatologist. She has received several awards and has established the Nancy Burton Esterly Scholarship at the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine. She graduated with a medical degree from Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine in Baltimore in 1960; her residency training in internal medicine and pediatrics was at Johns Hopkins Hospital. Esterly–McKusick syndrome, also known as stiff skin syndrome, is a rare disorder that was originally described by Esterly and McKusik in 1971. It is characterized by stony-hard skin, limited joint mobility, and mild overlying hypertrichosis. Since the first report, at least 37 cases have been reported in the literature (Liu et al., 2008).

Lilane Schnitzler (Fig. 1) is a French dermatologist who was born in 1938. She was the first woman to be a professor of dermatology in France and the first "Maître de Conférence Agrégé en dermatologie." She was head of the Angers' dermatology department at the age of 31, a post she held for 36 years, until 2005 (Al Aboud and Al Aboud, 2013b). She is now linked to the original description of Schnitzler's syndrome, an urticarial rash and monoclonal gammopathy (Schnitzler, 1972), and the subsequent refinement of the clinical presentation (Schnitzler et al., 1974). She has published extensively and collaborated with Robert Degos, among others (Riaux, 2006).

Virginia Sybert is an American dermatologist and medical geneticist. She has established a large clinic for children and adults with Turner syndrome, investigating several aspects of the disease's natural history. Palmoplantar keratoderma (PPK) of Sybert, previously referred to as Greither's PPK, was described in 1952. It is an autosomal-dominant condition with variable expression and is extremely rare. PPK of Sybert is characterized by erythema, hyperkeratosis, and desquamation of the palms and soles with lateral and dorsal extension, which characteristically involves the Achilles tendon (Leonard and Freedberg, 2003).

Radiologists

Wilma Canada was born in West Virginia and raised in Kentucky. She earned her medical degree from Duke University in 1950, dismissing the myth that little girls did not grow up to be doctors, as she had been told. She became a radiologist and worked at University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences from 1956 to 1997. During her

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Table 1
Curth's Criteria.

- Both conditions start at approximately the same time.
- Both conditions follow a parallel course.
- A specific tumor occurs with a specific skin manifestation.
- There is a statistical association between the two conditions.
- There is a genetic linkage.

residency at Massachusetts General Hospital, she recognized—along with Dr. Cronkhite, a resident in Medicine—the syndrome that bears their names (Ostor and Phillips, 1999). Cronkhite–Canada syndrome (CCS) is a sporadically occurring, noninherited disorder first reported in 1955 as a new distinct clinical entity in two female patients with generalized gastrointestinal polyps, cutaneous pigmentation, alopecia, and onychodystrophy (Chronkhite and Canada, 1955).

Ophthalmologists

Ester Elizabeth Groenblad was a Swedish ophthalmologist (1898-1970). She qualified in medicine at the University of Stockholm in 1929 and subsequently trained in ophthalmology in Stockholm. Groenblad and James Strandberg, a Swedish dermatologist, established the relationship of pseudoxanthoma elasticum and angioid streaks in the retina (McKusick, 1972), and named it Groenblad–Strandberg syndrome. The skin changes in pseudoxanthoma elasticum were first described in 1881 by a French dermatologist, D. Rigal. The term "pseudoxanthoma elasticum" itself was first used in 1896 by another French dermatologist, Ferdinand-Jean Darie, in an attempt to differentiate this condition from common xanthomas (Georgalas et al., 2011).

Pathologists

Sophie Spitz (1910-1956, Fig. 2) was an American pathologist (Al Aboud and Al Aboud, 2013b). She was from Nashville, Tennessee, but was of Jewish descent (her parents were of Austrian and German descent; Shapiro, 1999). She worked as an intern at her uncle Hermann Spitz's pathology laboratory during her high school and college years. She earned both her bachelor of arts (1929) and medical doctorate (1932) from Vanderbilt University. She was married to another famous pathologist, Arthur C. Allen (Shimek and Golitz, 1999). Spitz is well-known for describing juvenile melanomas and proposing a more benign course in children (Spitz, 1948). She was a pathologist at the Memorial Hospital for Cancer and Allied Diseases in New York (Spatz and Barnhill, 1999) and co-authored a textbook, *Pathology of Tropical Diseases* (Ash and Spitz, 1945). She was a medical examiner for the City of New York and an early proponent of the Pap (Papanincolaou) smear; she died at the age of 46 of colon cancer, her father also dying young of similar issues, having had multiple colonic polyps (Schnitzler, 1972).

Figure 1. Professor Lilane Schnitzler (courtesy of the Our Dermatology Online-www.odermatol.com).

Figure 2. Doctor Sophie Spitz (courtesy of Wikimedia commons).

Maria Magdalena Dabska (1921-2014) was born in the town of Brodnica, about 40 miles northeast of Torun, Poland. The Dąbska tumor is the only other cutaneous tumour named in honor of a female pathologist. She survived the Warsaw Uprising in 1944 (a 63-day battle between the Polish resistance and the Nazi Occupying Army won by the Nazis after Stalin's Russian troops failed to provide support to the Polish, resulting in the death of over 16,000 Polish resistance fighters and up to 200,000 Warsaw residents and the destruction of 60% of Warsaw's buildings) as a combatant with her brother, but was taken as a civilian, along with her mother, to the German internment camp Stalag VI-C Oberlangen until the end of the war (Schwartz and Janniger, 2011). She later graduated from Gdañsk medical school after the Second World War and worked in its pathology department before moving to Warsaw to work under Professor Józef Laskowski. Dabska published a case series of angiosarcomas in 1969, calling them malignant endovascular papillary angioendotheliomas, but her name is now linked to these Dabska tumours (Dabska, 1969). She published extensively, particularly on sweat gland, soft tissue, and bone tumors; she became chief of pathology in Warsaw, but subsequently moved to Austria, Germany, to resist joining the communist party (Janniger and Schwartz, 2012). She later moved to the United States before returning to Warsaw (Zielinski, 2015). She named another famous Polish physician, Professor Stephania Jablonska, as a great inspiration and help for her medical career. Dabska's son is a dermatologist and pathologist.

Georgina Hogg (1916-2002) was a Canadian pathologist whose name is attached to the cancer syndrome Birt–Hogg–Dube, which she described in 1977 (Birt et al., 1977) with her dermatology (Birt) and endocrinology (Dube) colleagues (Al Aboud and Al Aboud, 2013a). She studied at Manitoba University in 1945, joined the Winnepeg General Hospital's medical faculty in 1953, and was highly regarded nationally, becoming director of the surgical pathology department (Hogg, 2002) and an associate professor and professor emeritus at the University of Manitoba (Deaths, 2002).

Nurses

Sister Mary Joseph Dempsey, born Julia Dempsey (1856-1939), was a nurse at St Mary's Hospital in Rochester, Minnesota (Al Aboud and Al Aboud, 2013c). She was surgical assistant to William Mayo from 1890 to 1915. She observed an association between an umbilical nodule and intra-abdominal malignancy, publishing a case report in 1928; thus,

Figure 3. From left to right Clarence Cook Little (1888-1971); Edgar Allen (1892-1943); Howard Bancroft Andervont (1898-1981); Madge Thurlow Macklin (1893-1962); Leiv Kreyberg (b. 1896); Gioacchino Failla (1891-1961); and Henri Coutard (1876-1950) (courtesy of https://www.flickr.com/photos/smithsonian/6891461979/in/photolist - from the Smithsonia Institute).

the term Sister Joseph's Nodule entered the medical literature in Hamilton Bailey's 1949 textbook, *Physical Signs in Clinical Surgery*. She was superintendent of St. Mary's Hospital between 1892 and 1939 and is quoted as saying, "To my very dear friends: I do not deserve the plaudits given to me tonight but I will take them to distribute them among the Sisters with whom I have worked so many years to make Saint Mary's Hospital a house of God and a gateway to heaven for His many suffering children" (Quotations, n.d.).

Patients

Mrs. Mortimer was a 65-year-old Londoner who was a patient of Jonathan Hutchinson (1828-1923). In 1898, he used the term Mortimer malady to describe the condition that affected Mrs. Mortimer, characterized by multiple, raised, dusky-red patches that spread slowly in an almost symmetrical pattern. The absence of ulcers and crust distinguished this entity from lupus vulgaris. The technical term is lupus vulgaris multiplex non-ulcerans et non-serpiginous (Sharma and Papanikaou, 2009).

Geneticists

Madge (nee Thurlow) Macklin (1893-1962, Fig. 3) was a preeminent geneticist in her day, strongly advocating the need for teaching genetics at all medical schools (Macklin, 1932). She was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and graduated from John Hopkins Medical School in 1919 (Macklin, 2002). She married Charles Macklin, associate professor of anatomy at John Hopkins, in 1918 and had three daughters; she later moved to Canada, to the University of Western Ontario, where she began working part time as in instructor in 1921 and became an assistant professor in 1930 (Mehler, 1980). Although her name is remembered for the previously mentioned Curth–Macklin syndrome, she is probably most famed for her support and publications on eugenics (Macklin, 1934a, 1934b) and setting up the Canadian Eugenics society.

In 1946, she became a research associate and medical genetics lecturer at Ohio State University in Columbus (Comfort, 2006), specializing in cancer research. In 1942, she became the first woman to give the Gibson Memorial Lecture at the University of Buffalo; she was awarded the Elizabeth Blackwell Medal of the American Medical Women's Association in 1957; and she was elected president of the American Society for Human Genetics in 1959 (Leeming, 2015). She retired in 1959 and died 3 years later of a heart attack.

Pediatricians

Katherine Krom Merritt (1886-1986) was an American pediatrician. She was born in Stamford, Connecticut, and after graduating from John Hopkins Medical school in 1917 went on to private practice in Manhattan (Dr. Katharine Krom Merritt, 1986). She also worked as an associate attending pediatrician at the Babies Hospital of the Columbia Presbyterian Medical center and the Vanderbilt Clinic. She worked as a consultant at Stanford hospital and lectured for the College of Physicians and Surgeons. Her name is linked to the Kasabach–Merritt phenomenon, the potentially fatal clotting derangement that can occur in certain vascular tumors (Kasabach and Merritt, 1940). Her impact to medicine in general also extends to her charity work, with her setting up the Stamford branch to the Family and Children's service with her sister and providing volunteer services. She died at the age of 100 years, having dedicated her life to medicine.

Concluding Comments

As eponyms are slowly dropping out of common parlance, it is important to remember those who have advanced our knowledge and understanding of dermatology. We have recounted the work of several famous women to honor their work and impact on dermatology.

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