

## Letter to the Editor about the Article “Barrett or Barré?: The Need to End a Common Mispronunciation Among Portuguese Physicians”

### Carta ao Editor sobre o Artigo “Barrett ou Barré?: A Necessidade de Eliminação de uma Pronúncia Incorreta Entre os Médicos Portugueses”

**Keywords:** Eponyms; History of Medicine; Medical Education  
**Palavras-chave:** Epónimos; História da Medicina; Educação Médica

Dear Editor,

We found the question raised by Sá-Marta and Almeida about the spelling for eponyms interesting.<sup>1</sup> We are afraid that disease names will hardly be correctly spelt by Portuguese physicians, because it would require proficiency in several foreign languages such as English, French or Italian, not to mention non-European languages. On the other hand, it can also sound strange to hear a non-Portuguese speaker spelling “Egas Moniz” or “Corino de Andrade”, but if any doubt remains, context is king.

What is the place for eponyms in modern Medicine? Some of them like Parkinson’s or Alzheimer’s disease are cornerstone disorders recognized *per se*. They are strongly linked to the clinical syndromes they represent, even by the non-medical community, a reason why they can hardly be

detached from them. Others, like Guillain-Barré syndrome (GBS) or Machado Joseph disease (MJD), have been sidelined by a more ‘pathophysiological’ term which relates to their clinical characteristics: “acute inflammatory demyelinating polyneuropathy” in the case of GBS and “spinocerebellar ataxia type 3” in MJD, although eponyms are still frequently used. Such kind of designation (‘columnar-lined esophagus’) has already been proposed to replace ‘Barrett’s esophagus’.<sup>2</sup>

Disease eponyms can otherwise lead to potential confusions. They frequently mention only some of the physicians who had an impact on the history of a disease or even give credit to the erroneous person. Jean-Alexandre Barré has recognisable merits in systematizing the clinical features of GBS but shared them with several other physicians other than Georges Guillain.<sup>3</sup> An Italian neurologist, Giovanni Mingazzini, also preceded Barré in the description of the pronator drift, a sign of pyramidal motor weakness in the upper limbs which is known as ‘Barré sign’.<sup>3</sup>

Nonetheless, in times of intense technological pressure, eponyms are yet a ground to bring us medical care provided by real doctors, not machines. We believe that their recognition and learning should be encouraged as a step to place modern Medicine in the course of a broader historical context.

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Diogo REIS CARNEIRO✉<sup>1,2</sup>, João André SOUSA<sup>1</sup>

1. Neurology Department. Centro Hospitalar e Universitário de Coimbra. Coimbra. Portugal.

2. Faculty of Medicine. University of Coimbra. Coimbra. Portugal.

Autor correspondente: Diogo Reis Carneiro. [diogoreiscarneiro@gmail.com](mailto:diogoreiscarneiro@gmail.com)

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