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FASCIA SCIENCE AND CLINICAL APPLICATIONS: FASCIAL NOMENCLATURE

Fascial eponyms may help elucidate terminological and nomenclatural development



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Summary It has been reported that at least 700 anatomical eponyms were in existence at the end of the 19th century, yet the number of eponyms expressly relating to fasciae is unknown, and these anatomical expressions have yet to be described as a group. This study accordingly aimed to assemble a comprehensive-as-possible list of these terms, to investigate their customary usage, and to consider whether their existence might usefully shed light on contemporary fascia-relating terminological development. A search for fascia-relating eponyms incorporated within a range of English language anatomical and medical publications during the past 400 years resulted in the discovery of 44 eponyms that explicitly refer to aspects of fascia. This article outlines and discusses the origin, meaning, and use of these terms, and concludes that an understanding of the history of fascial eponyms may be of value when addressing contemporary concerns with the language used to describe fascia.

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Introduction

Definition of key terms used in this article: Anatomical term, Technical word or expression that refers to a specific part of the body; Anatomical terminology, Practical vocabulary of commonly used anatomical terms; Anatomical nomenclature, Officially approved terminological system intended to normalise use of anatomical language; Synonym, A word having the same meaning as another in the same language; Eponym, (1) A word or name based on or derived from a person's name, (2) A person, real or mythical, for whom something is named; Anatomical eponym, Body structure whose name is derived from that of a person, mostly the anatomist credited with its discovery.

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Anatomical terminology consists of a multitude of words and expressions that correspond to different aspects of body structure and thus enable information transfer and communication about the body across human society. Most modern anatomical terms succinctly describe a particular part of the body (e.g., anterior intermuscular septum of leg, dorsal fascia of hand), hence are called 'descriptive terms.' It is not unusual, however, for more than one name to be synonymously ascribed to the same structure (e.g., thoracolumbar fascia, thoracolumbar aponeurosis, lumbodorsal fascia). Advances in anatomical discovery, the advent of

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descriptive terminology, extensive use of synonyms (including eponyms), and publication of anatomy texts in a range of languages – rather than just in Latin – jointly augmented an enormous expansion in anatomical terminology between the 17th and late 19th centuries (Sakai, 2007). Toward the end of this period, more than 50,000 terms were used to identify 5000 structures (Eycleshymer, 1917), so, O’Rahilly (1989) explains, ‘anatomical terminology was in a state of chaos, incoherent, full of inequities, contradictions, and obscurities’. Several influential anatomists – including Jacob Henle, Josef Hyrtl, Karl Gegenbaur, and Jean–Léo Testut – addressed but were individually unable to rectify these issues (Sakai, 2007). The terminological excess and confusion were ultimately eased through the collaborative and sustained effort of the international anatomy profession, specifically through their production of a series of democratically approved nomenclature lists. The first, widely known as the *Basel Nomina Anatomica* (BNA), was published in 1895, and the latest, the *Terminologia Anatomica* (TA), in 1998 (Federative Committee on Anatomical Terminology [FCAT]) and 2011 (Federative International Programme on Anatomical Terminologies [FIPAT]). Although the BNA contained a few widely used eponyms – as synonyms for approved terms (Dobson, 1962) – they have since been omitted from the official nomenclature lists (O’Rahilly, 1989) because, from their developers’ perspective, ‘they are often incorrect, they vary from country to country, and they sometimes commemorate the names of relatively unimportant anatomists, while really great figures, such as Vesalius, have their names attached only to small and inconstant structures’ (Mitchell, 1961). This decision has, however, been widely disregarded in practice, resulting in the inclusion of an appended Index of just over 400 eponymous terms, numerically cross-referenced to the main word lists, in both TA editions (FCAT, 1998; FIPAT, 2011).

Anatomical eponyms

The term ‘eponym’ is formed from the Greek words *epi* [ἐπί], meaning ‘upon’, and *onama* [ὄνομα], meaning ‘a name’ (Simpson and Weiner, 1989). From the 16th century onwards, many anatomical parts have been named after people (Dobson, 1962), both real and imaginary (Rodin and Key, 1989). Initially, an ‘anatomical eponym’ referred to a person (e.g., Antonio Scarpa) whose surname is associated, correctly or otherwise, with the original description of a particular piece of the body. Nowadays this term is usually interpreted to mean a body part (e.g., Scarpa’s fascia) whose name is derived from that of a person (Stringer, 2009). By the 18th century, the kudos of being commemorated in this manner meant many, in Moore’s words (2005, p. 97), ‘vied to discover and name previously unmapped parts of the body, staking their claim to a piece of the human interior. Intrepid anatomists could be assured of immortality through the parts they described; if they did not themselves bestow their names on their discoveries they could be certain that their disciples would arrange that honour.’ Consequently, the inception of some eponyms may have been ‘heavily determined by influence, politics, language, or sheer luck’ (Woywodt and Matteson, 2007).

By the close of the 19th century, there were over 700 anatomical eponyms in existence (Dobson, 1962), and more have been created since then. Many are still deeply entrenched in medical language, yet their continuance is controversial (Winkelmann, 2011; Aronson, 2014; Fargen and Hoh, 2014; Gest, 2014). Their proponents value how these ‘herographic’ expressions memorialise some eminent forebears, and their conveniently succinct, yet colourful, manner of identifying complex phenomena (Whitworth, 2007; Stringer, 2009; Orly, 2014a). Others contend that eponyms are essentially flawed, predominantly by (debatable) equating their general lack of scientific descriptiveness with a shortfall in exactitude. In addition, their critics complain that these expressions are often poorly defined, frequently overlap in meaning, sometimes honour the wrong (and occasionally unethical) people, can ignore the important and perhaps prior contributions of others, are plagued with grammatical errors, and are inconstantly interpreted in different countries. They are consequently regarded as an impediment to efficient communication and learning (Whitworth, 2007; Woywodt and Matteson, 2007; Fargen and Hoh, 2014; Orly, 2014b).

Despite their established employment, the number of eponyms expressly relating to fasciae is unknown, and these anatomical expressions have yet to be described as a group. This study therefore aimed to assemble a comprehensive-as-possible list of these terms, to investigate their customary usage, and to consider whether their existence could usefully shed light on contemporary fascia-relating language development.

Method

This investigation was based on an open-ended search for fascia-relating eponyms, and information about them, contained within English language written material published during the past 400 years. It predominantly examined bioscientific, medical, and bodywork literature (i.e., anatomical and medical eponym lists, anatomical nomenclatures, anatomy textbooks, medical dictionaries, peer reviewed journals, and monographs) retrieved from the University of Otago’s (in New Zealand) and the author’s own library collections, as well as the Early English Books Online, Eighteenth Century Collections Online, and archive.org digital libraries. The location, retrieval, and thematic analysis of this information was assisted and augmented by a series of Google and Google Scholar keyword searches that singly related to the general (e.g., ‘anatomy eponyms’, ‘eponyms for fascia’) and individual (e.g., ‘Camper’s fascia’, ‘Waldeyer’s fascia’) meaning and deployment (e.g., ‘anatomy eponym debate’, ‘Nazi eponyms’) of this particular type of anatomical expression.

Anatomical eponyms are usually presented in either of two grammatical forms, possessive (e.g. Abernethy’s fascia) and non-possessive (Abernethy fascia), depending on the country, time period, and publication in which they are employed (MacAskill and Anderson, 2013). Both word forms have been used since the late 19th century (as in Foster, 1892), although support for the non-apostrophized word type appears to be currently increasing (Fargen and Hoh, 2014; Orly, 2014b). This article, however, primarily uses

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