

Jon Garvey chews the cud



Unhappy handles

Have you ever wondered why drugs are called by their particular names? A glance through MIMS uncovers the work of a huge number of specialised research staff, whose sole function in life is to find a more manageable monicker for co-dergocrine mesylate, or whatever it may be.

Many reasons are given for not using simply the approved names of drugs. The first is that these are long and unwieldy, and therefore troublesome to prescribe and remember. Think how tedious it would be, for example, if we had to scrawl out "naproxen" every time, instead of "Naprosyn".

Another reason often given for these names is that the approved names may be very similar and thus cause errors. While this may be true, it is no argument in favour of proprietary names. At least similar sounding chemical names denote similar chemicals, so little harm is likely to result from a mistake.

In contrast, there are many confusing similarities between branded drugs which arise simply from lack of imagination, and cover widely differing substances. The hay fever sufferer, for instance, who is accidentally given Optimine instead of Opticrom may not notice much difference, but what if he is given Optimax? Are your diabetics on Daonil by name? If so, watch that they don't get De-nol, or worse still, Danol. A patient may be quite pleased that Mucaine helped his indigestion, but less so if he is accidentally given Moducron, especially if what he really wanted was some Mucron to clear the

phlegm, caused by his being given Nulacin instead of Nuelin for the bronchospasm produced when he got Inderal instead of Indocid...

Of course, the principal reason for these approved names is to sell the drug, both to doctors and patients, which is why most of them sound like secret ingredients from washing powders.

Somebody has decided that the most scientific words have three syllables with the stress on the first, as in strontium, acetate, tylopod (Potiphar's choice). Thus, manufacturers string together random syllables with a vowel, usually "o", in between, and produce a word which fools even the doctor into believing it makes some sense.

To demonstrate this point, underline those of the following words which sound like drugs: Paynocil, Labiton, Ventongimps, Baccotin, Varbian, Plastofudge, Helocid, Marzipam. Not easy, is it? Apparently, a firm in America had a machine turning out these random syllables to be sold to pharmaceutical companies, but it had to be closed down when it kept on suggesting names like Mikifin and Barmised.

The name game

In some drugs, particularly, for some reason, psychotropics, the name is a good portion of the therapeutic value, as in Surmontil, Concordin, Motival, and Halcion. This suggestive effect in the name explains why Oblivon was taken off the market. Another variety of drugs where the names actually *are* related to their stated function is in female hormone preparations, which constantly remind their takers of their bodily functions, by various combinations of "Ovu-", "Gyno-", "-gest-" etc. Unfortunately it doesn't work, as is testified by the number of women asking for more of their *Yujin* or *My-Crone*-or.

Some names seem to have arisen from a burst of "inspiration" on the part of one of the marketing boys. Gyno-daktarin, apparently, is Swahili for gynaecologist. I wonder what the Bantu for "Gestalt Therapist" is? Pregaday would be neat if it weren't so embarrassing that all the mums refuse to take it. Tell a patient on a cardiac unit that

he is to be given Cordilox, and he will usually reply that he feels too ill even for the dark-haired one in the Sister's uniform.

Finally, there is a whole category of names which should never have been given to drugs at all. I include a brief glossary of these together with their original use, now sadly eclipsed:

Bolvidon: Defoliant used in latter stages of Vietnam War

Serc: Valve-grinding compound

Nardil: Elfin princess who became second wife of Frodo Baggins

Klyx: Make of DIY shelf-fittings

Adalat: Brand of chemical toilet

Tace: Missile system deployed in USA

Mogadon: Dinosaur with cat-like teeth

Marplan: Quality dining furniture

Primperan: Onomatopoeic word used to describe brief trumpet fanfare

Levius: Latin poet of 3rd century BC.

I hope I have demonstrated that the majority of brand names used for the drugs we prescribe daily are mere strings of letters and thoroughly without merit. Not so, however, for the approved names. Remember that these are coined by true scientists working apart from the sordid world of the multinational marketing concerns. They are devised by truly spiritual people, and it shows. Just consider, in closing, these few examples: acrosoxacin; bemegrade; ciclacillin; debrisoqume—these words were not invented. They flowed from the heart. They are true poetry!

Ah, roll on the day of renewal; the day of generic prescribing!▪

Camel's back

The osteopath said that my wife's headaches were caused by dreadful imbalances of her atlas, and produced impressive grinding noises and electric shocks in the nerve roots when he twisted it back. His sessions of muscle massage were soothing, too, and were only curtailed when the Family Allowance money ran out. The only thing he didn't do was made the headaches better.

Potiphar is unsympathetic. He says we'd have been better off going to a Cairopractor.▪