



Physician's Lexicon

The Limbs of Medicine

MOST ANATOMIC TERMS ARE OF LATIN ORIGIN but each organ, each body part, is also blessed with a vernacular name, typically of Anglo-Saxon origin. And thus words such as head, toe, leg, finger and arm are derived from Old English and earlier, from Proto-germanic languages.

The word, limb, defining both arms and legs, is also of Old English origin: The word, *lim*, meant a part of, a member of, and in some Old-Germanic tongues it also meant a loose joint thus giving rise to the English words, limp and limber, meaning variously, looser, pliant or flexible. Limpid, on the other hand, stems from the Latin, *limpidus*, meaning clear, transparent; in turn, from the Greek name for a water goddess and from which the word, lymph, is derived.

The Latin, *limbus*, meaning edge or border descends without change to

define the corneal margin or boundary of the tympanic membrane. A similar Latin term, *limus*, meaning aslant or sidelong, evolves into the English, limit, meaning a fringe or boundary. (as in 'the city limits'). The medical term, liminal (and subliminal), refers to the lower boundaries of sensation or sensations not felt.

The word, limbo, similarly comes from *limbus*, but now in its ablative form, to define a region between heaven and hell, reserved for saints and early church fathers (*in limbo patrum*). It was a region, a temporary station, assigned particularly to the patriarchs of the Old Testament awaiting entry into heaven; and for dead infants (*limbus puerorum*) similarly awaiting assignment to paradise.

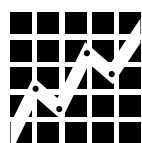
A Greek word, *limne*, meaning marsh may be confusing. The older medical term, limnemia, means chronic malaria

(marsh fever.) Yet another Greek root, *limos*, meaning hunger, appears in medical words such as limophthisis (emaciation) and limosis (starvation).

Alembic (a term defining medieval vessels employed for distilling medications) is from the Arabic defining 'the cup.'

A lemniscus, defining a bundle of nerve fibers, has a complex etymological origin. The Aegean island, Lemnos, was famed for its colorful fabrics, giving rise to a Greek term meaning ribbon. This, in turn led to the Latin, *lemniscus*, meaning bands or ribbons.

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VITAL STATISTICS

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Rhode Island Monthly Vital Statistics Report Provisional Occurrence Data from the Division of Vital Records

Underlying Cause of Death	Reporting Period			
	October 2010	12 Months Ending with October 2010		
Diseases of the Heart	Number (a) 195	Number (a) 2,247	Rates (b) 213.3	YPLL (c) 3,156.5
Malignant Neoplasms	199	2,277	216.2	6,181.5
Cerebrovascular Diseases	33	456	43.3	620.0
Injuries (Accidents/Suicide/Homicide)	53	617	58.6	10,119.0
COPD	47	498	47.3	527.5

Vital Events	Reporting Period		
	April 2011	12 Months Ending with April 2011	
	Number	Number	Rates
Live Births	1,005	11,754	11.2*
Deaths	789	9,996	9.5*
Infant Deaths	(7)	(69)	5.9#
Neonatal Deaths	(5)	(67)	5.7#
Marriages	356	6,117	5.8*
Divorces	218	3,204	3.0*
Induced Terminations	338	4,087	347.7#
Spontaneous Fetal Deaths	52	626	53.3#
Under 20 weeks gestation	(47)	(556)	55.6#
20+ weeks gestation	(5)	(68)	5.8#

(a) Cause of death statistics were derived from the underlying cause of death reported by physicians on death certificates.

(b) Rates per 100,000 estimated population of 1,053,209. (www.census.gov)

(c) Years of Potential Life Lost (YPLL).

Note: Totals represent vital events that occurred in Rhode Island for the reporting periods listed above. Monthly provisional totals should be analyzed with caution because the numbers may be small and subject to seasonal variation.

* Rates per 1,000 estimated population

Rates per 1,000 live births