

Bullet points

The “Therapeutic antibodies” feature (October, p 33) begins, “A century ago, Paul Ehrlich referred to antibodies as ‘magic bullets.’” It should say that Ehrlich referred to *antibiotics* as “magic bullets”. The words antibody and antibiotic represent very different concepts. The magic bullet reference historically refers to antimicrobial agents (antibiotics, produced by microorganisms and modified into synthetic and semisynthetic creations). This is an opportunity to aid the public in understanding the differences between closely related terms that help in the fight against infectious disease. Scientific literacy for the layperson is an important function to those of us in ACS and in the American Society for Microbiology.

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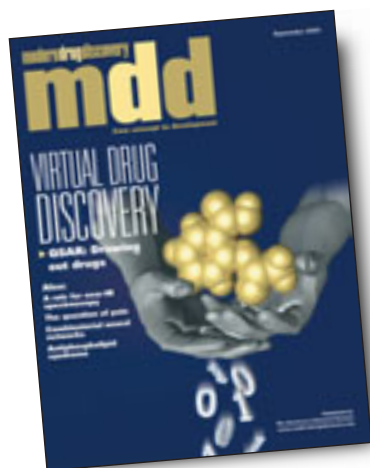
Editors' reply:

Your point is well taken. Ehrlich's aim, as the Nobel e-Museum site puts it, was “to find chemical substances which have special affinities for pathogenic organisms...” (www.nobel.se/medicine/laureates/1908/ehrlich-bio.html).

Pain palliatives

I enjoyed your September article on pain control (For Your Health, p 19). Two drugs that you did not mention might fit into a future article: One is tramadol—touted as the most powerful nonnarcotic analgesic, and the other is methadone. For intense pain that responds only partly to morphine, methadone can be a lifesaver—without the respiratory depression associated with effective doses of morphine. Interviews with physicians at major pain clinics might provide the basis for an interesting article—and might help patients whose pain is not adequately managed by conservative treatment. Just as thalidomide has taken on a new life as an antiangiogenic agent, methadone might overcome its stigma and help with a major unmet medical need.

Mark Saifer
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Significant statistics

Regarding the “Drawing out drugs” feature (September, p 28): I have done a lot of work on a statistical method called recursive partitioning (RP) and have shown how previous versions of RP can be modified to deal with complex chemistry data sets. This work was done at GSK, and a commercial version of RP is available (www.goldenhelix.com). A number of papers came out of GlaxoSmithKline. One won the Statistics in Chemistry prize from the American Statistical Association. These papers are highly cited, so I was surprised that Nancy Ogihara (of Accelrys) did not mention the GSK work. I have no problem with scientists from commercial companies writing for magazines, but they should try to cover the subject beyond the offerings of their own company. In this case, I think readers will know of the GSK work, but they may not be aware of the Golden Helix software, which is specifically designed for chemistry problems.

Stan Young

(See Rusinko, A. III; et al. *J. Chem. Inf. Comput. Sci.* **1999**, *39*, 1017–1026.)

Unsung aspirin hero

In your editorial “The new fluoridation?” (Content in Context, August, p 7), I was disappointed to see you perpetuate the myth of Felix Hoffmann's invention of aspirin in 1897. In fact, recent historical reviews have demonstrated conclusively that aspirin was

invented not by Hoffmann but by Arthur Eichengrün, who also worked at Bayer at that time. Please see the article published in the *British Medical Journal* in December 2000 on this subject.

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Editors' reply:

The article cited (*Br. Med. J.* **2000**, *321*, 1591–1594) illustrates the complexity of this story, as does the Chemical Heritage Foundation in its article titled “Due Credit for Arthur Eichengrün” (www.chemheritage.org/EducationalServices/pharm/asp/as60.htm).

Verbal variants

It was delightful to read your July editorial (Content in Context, p 7) focusing on word meanings. The excessive use of words to “denote exclusivity rather than to convey understanding” is something I struggle with every day in deciding whether to add terms to the MeSH categorization vocabulary of Medline. Some people have drawn a distinction between metabolism, metabolomics, and metabonomics based on genetic scope, but are these subtle spelling variants really helping at clarifying and categorizing? Other frequently used terms that deviate from implied meaning are phenolics and phytoestrogens. In any of these cases, it is important to ask if the word satisfies three basic criteria: usefulness, reproducibility, and understandability. In regard to your question about who defines these terms, one source that I have found useful (if not authoritative) is www.genomicglossaries.com.

Soaring Bear

Medical Subject Headings (MeSH),
National Library of Medicine

Correction

The grid for The Word Puzzle in the August issue contained several errors. A corrected version has been posted on our website (<http://pubs.acs.org/subscribe/journals/mdd/v06/i08/pdf/803puzzle.pdf>).