

Gelotherapy

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Medical journals are too serious and laughterless. This is why we must prescribe gelotherapy (from the Greek γελωσ [laughter]) on appropriate occasions. The animal kingdom has its laughing-bird (the yaffle or green woodpecker), -jackass (the kookaburra or giant kingfisher of Australia), -crow, -goose (the white-fronted goose), -gull, -owl and -thrush (song babbler), not to mention the laugher (a variety of domestic pigeon) and the laughing hyena, with its demoniac laughter. Down the scale we find the grinning animals: Shakespeare's "wolfe doth grin before he barketh", and Carroll's Cheshire cat can grin in absentia, as it were:¹

This time it vanished quite slowly, beginning with the end of the tail, and ending with the grin, which remained some time after the rest of it had gone.

But why should these laughy animals have all the fun? If our laughter-makers are idle and produce nothing laughworthy, how can we laughter-dimple our laughing muscles (the risorius) or laughter-crack our sides with laughter bursts? It is not by laughing gas alone that our eyes can be filled with laughter-twinkling or our long winter evenings be laughter-lighted or -lit. Why should a laughter be the collective noun for ostlers (stable men or grooms) and not for doctors as well? How, in the absence of the laughsome, can we use our gelotometers (laugh meters) for gelotscopy (divining persons' qualities or character by observing their laughter)?

The Romans celebrated the Hilaria (whence hilarious) at the vernal equinox (Mar. 25), a feast in honour of Cybele, the great Phrygian mother-goddess, presumably wearing her other hat as mistress of wild nature. In our culture Apr. 1 is the traditional date for

merriment. The French, indulging in ichthyolatry, or fish-worship, speak of poisson d'avril; in Scotland it is traditional to hunt the cuckoo or gowk (a Scottish word meaning cuckoo or half-wit), hen's teeth, a square circle or stirrup oil (which turns out to be several strokes from a leather strap).

All these gelastics can be used to keep up your spirits and avoid premature congelation (from the Latin *gelo* [freeze]) or congealing of the cerebral arteries. Our risus needs by no means always to be sardonic. We are pleased to publish on page 787 of this issue of the Journal, as our contribution to the general cachinnation (from the Latin *cachinnare* [laugh loudly]), our second Very Original Article, by a distinguished professor of pathology from Oslo, Dr. Olav Hilmar Iversen. The object of his research, volvolon, which determines on which side you lie in bed, is eminently risorial. Anyone who has not read the first Very Original Article, on Armpitin, in the Dec. 25, 1965 issue should refer back to it.²

Four items from *CMAJ* were indexed in *Index Medicus* from 1970 to 1980 under Wit and Humour³⁻⁵ (one of them from Dr. Iversen's institute, which must clearly have a very high risibility profile in the University of Oslo).⁶ In the next 10 years we hope we will receive rather more contributions in this category.

Any smileless reader objecting to this kind of light persiflage in the Apr. 1 edition of the Journal should write to the editor. The rest of you, laugh and be well!

References

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Humouring the physician

None can have more need of a sense of humour in his daily work than the physician. For most of us the few great characters that remain in our memories of student years — characters that seem to be dying out not to be replaced — are larger than life because of their humours (to use this word in its ancient sense) — their oddities, their flamboyancies and even their vulgarities. Even the stuffiest among us values this attribute and feels damned utterly if it is said of him that he has no sense of humour.

—Can Med Assoc J 1965; 93: 1370-1371