

Barrett or Barré?: The Need to End a Common Mispronunciation Among Portuguese Physicians

Barrett ou Barré?: A Necessidade de Eliminação de uma Pronunção Incorreta Entre os Médicos Portugueses

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Palavras-chave: Educação Médica; Esófago de Barrett; Portugal; Síndrome de Guillain-Barré

Dear Editor,

Norman Rupert Barrett was one of the first doctors to describe the condition that later became known as 'Barrett's esophagus', which refers to the replacement of the normal lower esophageal squamous epithelium by columnar epithelium.¹ Norman Barrett was born in Australia in 1903 and later moved to the United Kingdom where he carried out his medical training and worked as a thoracic surgeon.²

Jean-Alexandre Barré, on the other hand, was a French neurologist who first pointed out, along with Guillain and Strohl, the albuminocytologic dissociation present in two cases of Guillain-Barré syndrome in 1916.³ This condition is an immune-mediated polyneuropathy leading to an ascending flaccid paralysis.⁴

Nevertheless, it is still common for Portuguese doctors to pronounce Barrett's name as 'Barré'. This confusion might be due to the strong influence of the French medical literature, during the 20th century, within the Portuguese medical academia. Besides its erroneous nature, we describe a number of reasons why this habit of many Portuguese doctors should come to an end.

The problem does not only relate to the due respect for a great physician. Above all, it impairs the successful communication at international conferences and other communications made by Portuguese physicians and scientists. By saying 'Barré's esophagus', will the foreign medical colleague interpret this as an esophageal paralysis caused by Guillain-Barré syndrome?

Moreover, the mispronunciation of Barrett's name may elicit derisive comments from the public, and thus we feel that raising this matter is of significant relevance in the ever-more globalized world of science.

It is of utmost importance that the entire medical community, especially those who have teaching responsibilities in Portuguese medical schools, recognize the need to incorporate terms used in English medical literature and their accurate pronunciation in the training of future doctors. For the medical and/or surgical history enthusiast, the widespread mispronunciation of Barrett's name among the Portuguese medical community is certainly a hard pill to swallow.

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