

Correspondence

The Naming of Strep, with Apologies to T. S. Eliot

TO THE EDITOR—Regarding the excellent article on β -hemolytic streptococci by Broyles et al [1], my conclusion is that it is time, altogether, to stop identifying streptococci by hemolytic patterns or Lancefield grouping. Dr Lancefield did her work on group A and B streptococci in the 1930s, and her grouping, together with hemolytic patterns, remains reliable for *Streptococcus pyogenes* and *Streptococcus agalactiae*. In contrast, in the case of the other groupable streptococci, the species clearly do not follow so-called Lancefield groupings, nor does it follow hemolytic patterns. For those of us who teach infectious diseases, it is actually an embarrassment to lecture on this subject. Just try explaining to first-year students (or anyone else, for that matter) that individual species of streptococci can fall into Lancefield groups C, F, or G and may be α -, β -, or nonhemolytic.

The following parody on the famous T. S. Eliot poem, “The Naming of Cats” (the basis for the Broadway production of *Cats*) may be appropriate:

The Naming of Strep is a difficult matter,

It isn't just one of your holiday games;

You may think at first I'm as mad as a hatter

When I tell you, a strep may have three different names.

First of all, there's the name that the family use daily,

Such as alpha or beta or gamma—that's non,

Such as Lancefield Group G or else strep viridans

All of them everyday, sensible names.

There are fancier names if you think they sound sweeter,

Such as *bovis*, or *milleri* group or *mutans*,

All of these also are everyday names.

But I tell you, a strep needs a name that's particular,

Else how can it keep up its dignity and pride?

Of names of this kind, I can give you a listing,

Pyogenes, *pneumoniae* or else *gallolyticus*,

agalactiae, *dysgalactiae* subspecies *equisimilis*,

Intermedius, *constellatus* or just simply *canis*—

Names that never belong to more than one strep.

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Daniel M. Musher

Medical Care Line (Infectious Disease Section), Michael E. DeBakey Veterans Affairs Medical Center, and Departments of Medicine and Molecular Virology and Microbiology, Baylor College of Medicine, Houston, Texas

Reference

1. Broyles LN, Van Beneden C, Beall B, et al. Population-based study of invasive disease due to β -hemolytic streptococci of groups other than A and B. *Clin Infect Dis* 2009;48:706–12.

Reprints or correspondence: Dr Daniel M. Musher, Infectious Disease Section, Veterans Affairs Medical Center, 2002 Holcombe Blvd, Rm 4B-370, Houston, TX 77030 (daniel.musher@med.va.gov).

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