

Clinical Biochemistry News



ACBI



ACB

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Newsletter of the Association of Clinical Biochemists in Ireland
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Europe at night: Artificial light showing most densely populated areas (NASA)

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Dr Margaret Sinnott

Last June saw a commemorative meeting in honour of Dr. Margaret Sinnott, whose sudden death left her many friends and colleagues greatly saddened. Dr. Peadar McGing, Principal Clinical Biochemist in the Mater Hospital, attended the meeting and gives a report below.



Commemorating Margaret Sinnott

The morning of Friday June 12th 2015 saw scientists and clinicians from Ireland and beyond converge on the Mater Hospital's Postgraduate Centre for a very special conference. We were there to celebrate a cherished colleague, so tragically taken from us a few months before. Dr Margaret Sinnott, Consultant Chemical Pathologist, had been a good friend and esteemed colleague to many; the quality of the programme was a testament to the high regard in which she was held, with so many invited speakers and delegates travelling from near and far to participate.

The day-long conference was divided into three sessions, covering different areas of Margaret's interests. 'Oncology', 'Focus on Teaching', and 'Metabolic and Genetic Disease – where the future lies', were the titles of these sessions. In each we got some fascinating science and medicine, mixing need-to-know basics with cutting edge technology. We also got anecdotes of Margaret's contribution to the lives of the various speakers and chairs. The meeting finished with the first presentations of the Margaret Sinnott Medal and tributes to Margaret 'The remarkable woman in the big red bus'.

Of course, as well as the academic component of the day there was the chance to meet and talk with so many colleagues over coffee and over lunch, and to share stories of Margaret and what she had meant to every one of us. It was made extra special by being able to share this special event with Margaret's family. A photo album of the day will be posted on the [ACBI website](#).



Members' Publications

Weir RR, Carson EL, Mulhern MS, **Laird E, Healy M**, Pourshahidi LK. Validation of a food frequency questionnaire to determine vitamin D intakes using the method of triads. J Hum Nutr Diet. 2015 Aug 7 [Epub ahead of print].

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Veerappan SG, **Healy M**, Walsh BJ, O'Morain CA, Daly JS, Ryan BM. Adalimumab Therapy Has a Beneficial Effect on Bone Metabolism in Patients with Crohn's Disease. Dig Dis Sci. 2015 Jul;60(7):2119-29.

Duggan SN, Purcell C, **Kilbane M**, O'Keane M, McKenna M, Gaffney P, Ridgway PF, Boran G, Conlon KC. An association between abnormal bone turnover, systemic inflammation, and osteoporosis in patients with chronic pancreatitis: a case-matched study. Am J Gastroenterol. 2015 Feb;110(2):336-45 [Epub 2015 Jan 27].

Browne GA, Griffin TP, **O'Shea PM**, Dennedy MC. β-Blocker withdrawal is preferable for accurate interpretation of the aldosterone renin ratio in chronically treated hypertension. Clin Endocrinol (Oxf). 2015 Aug 24 [Epub ahead of print].

Daly N, **Stapleton M**, O'Kelly R, Kinsley B, Daly S, Turner MJ. The role of preanalytical glycolysis in the diagnosis of gestational diabetes mellitus in obese women. Am J Obstet Gynecol. 2015 Jul;213(1):84 [Epub 2015 Mar 12].

Garrahy A, Casey R, Wall D, Bell M, **O'Shea PM**. A review of the management of positive biochemical screening for pheochromocytoma and paraganglioma: a salutary tale. Int J Clin Pract. 2015 Jul;69(7):802-9.

Royal Hospital Kilmainham – Venue for ACBI 2015

The Royal Hospital Kilmainham (RHK) was designed by Sir William Robinson (1645-1712), official State Surveyor General of Ireland. Marsh's Library in Dublin and Charles Fort in Kinsale are some other surviving examples of his architecture. The building was commissioned by the Duke of Ormonde, James Butler, Lord Lieutenant of Ireland (1610-1688). It was built as a home for disabled soldiers and was inspired by Les Invalides built in Paris a few years earlier. It consists of four unbroken ranges enclosing a courtyard where the soldiers could exercise. The enclosed arcades around the perimeter correspond to passages on the floors above. The building was completed and opened in 1684. Built at a cost of £23,550 the money was raised from "a levy of sixpence in the pound out of the pay of every soldier and officer on the military establishment of Ireland."

The land on which the RHK is built and the surrounding Kilmainham area is rich in history. The name Kilmainham is derived from *Cill Mhaighneann*, meaning "St Maighneann's church". The church or monastery was established in the 7th century and was an important place of pilgrimage. In 1014 the High King of Ireland, Brian Boru, bivouacked on Bully's Acre in the grounds of the RHK prior to the Battle of Clontarf, exactly 1,000 years ago. In 1174 Strongbow (Richard de Clare, Earl of Pembroke), who had arrived in Ireland as part of the Norman invasion, established the Knights Hospitallers Priory in Kilmainham. It survived for about 365 years until the dissolution of the monasteries by Henry VIII in the 1530's.

The site of Bully's Acre holds Dublin's oldest public cemetery. Located just beyond the Richmond Tower on the Hospital grounds there has been a graveyard on this site for at least 1,000 years. It is thought that some of those killed at the Battle of Clontarf are buried here including the son and grandson of Brian Boru. Over time it evolved into a pauper's cemetery and it is estimated that there are over 100,000 bodies buried here. It has a colourful history with body-snatching rife in the 18th and 19th century. Robert Emmet, executed nearby in Thomas Street, was briefly interred in Bully's Acre before his body was removed. The whereabouts of his subsequent burial remains a mystery to this day. The cemetery was eventually closed to public use after the cholera epidemic of 1832.

The Irish Museum of Modern Art (IMMA) was opened in 1991 by Taoiseach Charles Haughey. Housed in the Royal Hospital Kilmainham the museum is the national institution for contemporary art and its permanent collection contains almost 1700 works.



Should Punctuation Matter in Clinical Medicine?

Peadar McGing makes a plea for clarity



Punctuation is the part of language that induces the widest variety of emotions, from those who believe passionately in it to those who believe it irrelevant and concede only to the odd full stop. I, I must confess, am a believer.

You may have noticed in my opening sentence I wrote ‘language’ rather than specifying ‘written language’. That is because, although you may ignore apostrophies and semi-colons in speech, most punctuation is designed to help you speak the words, either out loud or in your mind. Some time ago my daughters took Proficiency Exams in Speech and Drama and in that setting any failure to follow the writer’s punctuation exactly could cost dearly. Punctuation is designed to help you interpret what the writer meant exactly as the writer intended.

With the notable exception of James Joyce, most professional writers of literature are precise with punctuation. But what about ‘ordinary life’, and particularly what about scientific and medical writers? Do we need to bother with all the rules, all those fiddly little squiggles on the page? Surely we should just concentrate on what’s important, on getting the facts across. I’m sure very many readers would be thinking - leave the finer points of language to students of language and let scientists and clinicians concentrate on such practical matters as diagnostic findings. Let me say clearly that I would consider that a rather blinkered view.

The difference between IM (intra-muscular) and IV (intravenous) might be small when written down but can kill a patient if mixed up for some drugs. Now I don’t know of any such serious consequences arising from misplaced

punctuation. However, I believe that Clinical Medicine, both in the laboratory and in the wider health service, needs to be precise and sloppiness should not be acceptable. We have all seen cases where miscommunication can have serious effects. All communication should be as clear as possible, especially written communication. That clarity of communication demands proper use of punctuation.

A book about punctuation topping the Christmas best-sellers list is not what you would expect but that’s what happened in the UK and many other countries in 2003. The book in question was “Eats, Shoots & Leaves – the zero tolerance guide to punctuation” by Lynne Truss. It sold so well because it is not just a list of rules but is written in an interesting and amusing style. A review in Newsweek stated “You don’t need to be a grammar nerd to enjoy this one....Who knew grammar could be such fun.” I read this book last year, having had it on my must-read-sometime list for a while. It’s still available quite cheaply via the internet and is worth a read, irrespective of whether you agree with punctuation or believe it’s mostly a waste of ink. As one reviewer said – read it with an open mind and enjoy it.

If you have not read about this book before you may wonder about the title. It is derived from a clearly fictional story where a panda eats food in a restaurant, then shoots a gun into the air before leaving the premises. When questioned about his actions he hands the waiter a badly punctuated wildlife manual and says “I’m a panda. Look it up.” When the waiter reads the entry for Panda he sees “Large black-and-white bear-like mammal. Eats, shoots and leaves.”

A sentence commonly used to show how punctuation in different places can completely change the meaning is “A woman, without her man, is nothing.” OR “A woman: without her, man is nothing.” And what about the

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sentence “The people in the queue who got tickets were very satisfied.”? From this you assume only some people got tickets. But if you just add two commas you get “The people in the queue, who got tickets, were very satisfied.” Now you would assume everyone did get a ticket once they queued. Another very simple and very clear example was given to me by my daughter Susan. Leave out the comma in the invitation “Let’s eat, Grandma”, and you put the unfortunate woman in mortal danger – “Let’s eat Grandma”.

The May 2004 issue of the Annals of Clinical Biochemistry contained a review of Lynne Truss’s book by Dr William Marshall, well known to readers of this publication as author of numerous clinical biochemistry textbooks (and one of the examiners for my MRCPath viva). The inclusion in a prestigious clinical science journal of a review on such a book plus the content of that review support my belief in the importance of punctuation in our work. Dr Marshall states “I’m no expert, but for me, the most important functions of punctuation are two-fold: to avoid ambiguity, and, as a courtesy to the reader, to help them navigate the printed page.”

I also liked the definition given by Lynn herself when she wrote “Punctuation has been defined in many ways.... but best of all, I think, is the simple advice given by the style book of a national newspaper: that punctuation is “a courtesy designed to help readers to understand a story without stumbling”. So there you have it – making an effort to get punctuation right is not about being pedantic, it

is about courtesy to the person or persons you are communicating with. I believe such courtesy, and help with understanding, should apply to everything we write, whether a published article, a memo, a Standard Operating Procedure, an interpretative comment added to a lab report, or a note written in a chart.

The start of the Russian Revolution, access to Graham Greene’s personal papers in Georgetown University, the fiasco of the Jameson Raid in Transvaal in 1896, and the trial of Roger Casement for treason, are some of the high profile historical events which have hinged on punctuation marks. In today’s society where abbreviated text messages are a norm, punctuation may seem to some to be slipping into history itself. But I don’t believe it will disappear, because without it confusion reigns. I’ve seen plenty of examples of personal communications, including text messages, which misled or confused the reader just because of absent or misplaced commas.

George Bernard Shaw famously said that the biggest single problem with communication is the illusion it has been accomplished. The risk of misinterpretation can never be eliminated, but a lack of care with punctuation makes that possibility more likely. And that is hardly what you want.

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The illustration is from sleuthsayers.org/search/label/punctuation

The Power of the Comma (Urban Legends)

A Russian Tzarina saved a prisoners life by moving the comma on a warrant from the Tsar exiling a man to death. She changed “Pardon impossible, to be sent to Siberia.” to “Pardon, impossible to be sent to Siberia.” He was set free.

In the days of telegrams a woman travelling in Europe sees a lovely bracelet for \$75K. She cables her husband saying she’s thinking of buying it. The husband responds with the message: “No, price too high.” The telegraph operator forgot to include the comma after “No” and sent the message “No price too high”. You can guess the rest.

The International Year of Light

Alan Balfe: St. James's Hospital

This article draws on material from the IYL 2015 website (www.light2015.org).

On 20 December 2013, The United Nations (UN) General Assembly 68th Session proclaimed 2015 as the **International Year of Light and Light-based Technologies (IYL 2015)**. This came about following a resolution adopted by the UNESCO Executive Board in October 2012.



IYL 2015 is a global initiative to highlight to the citizens of the world the importance of light and optical technologies in their lives, for their futures and for the development of society.

The IYL 2015 programme consists of coordinated activities on national, regional and international levels.

The purpose is to enable people of all ages and backgrounds around the world to enjoy and appreciate the central role of light in science and culture, and to raise awareness of how optical technologies can promote sustainable development and provide solutions to worldwide challenges in energy, education, agriculture, communications and health.



Young and old around the world are inspired and united by the beauty of light in Nature. The rainbow is a striking illustration of both the scientific and cultural aspects of light. *IYL Prospectus*

The activities of the International Year of Light are structured around four broad thematic subject areas, and address central elements of sustainability, education and history. These themes are the “Science of Light”, “Light Technology”, “Light in Nature”, and “Light and Culture”.



From the IYL Prospectus

At the time of writing, the IYL website lists 2,454 events in 115 countries (1,906 past events, 373 future events and 175 ongoing events). Eighteen events are listed for Ireland including the Light and Health session of ACBI 2015. This high level of activity worldwide includes primary and secondary schools, third level colleges, professional bodies, public lectures, exhibitions, internet-based material, light shows, heritage site illuminations and more. Topics include art, literature, history, photography, architecture, engineering, lighting technology, fibre optics, solar energy, health, astronomy, cosmology and more. Here is a small selection of titles of events that are listed to illustrate the mix: “Shoot the Moonlight”, “Paisley Fall Fair - 'Sunflowers & Sunshine'”, “Supramolecular Photochemistry”, “Light and glass – from windows to optical fibres”, “International Observe the Moon Night”, “Aging friendly office lighting”, “You need chaos in your soul to generate a dancing star”, “The clocks of life: how they work and what happens when they are chronically perturbed”, “Globe at Night”, “Light on Love”, “Light in Blindness”, “The science of seeing inside your body”, “Light Ride – Milan”, “Solar Eclipses in Culture”, “Light: Beyond the Bulb”, “Right to dark skies”, “Light, Sound & Spumante”, “Shining a light on health and well being”, “Rethink the Night!”, “100 Years of General Relativity”, “Light, Art, the Universe and Everything”, “Divine light of Dante”, “The Musically Imagined World of Light”, “Light the Night”, “Winter Festival of Lights”, “Archaeology of Light: the light in prehistoric peoples' life”.

The IYL Prospectus describes how the year 2015 as the International Year of Light also commemorates a number of important milestones in the history of the science of light dating back 50, 100, 150, 200, 440 and 1,000 years:

In 1815, Fresnel published his first work introducing the theory of light as a wave and in 1865, Maxwell rigorously described the dynamic electro-magnetic theory of light. In 1915, the theory of General Relativity developed by Einstein showed how light was at the centre of the very structure of space and time. In 1965, Penzias and Wilson discovered the Cosmic Microwave Background, an electromagnetic echo of the very creation of the universe, and fiber optics pioneer Charles Kao developed the low loss optical fibre that enabled internet communications. The year 2015 also celebrates 1000 years since the great works on optics by the pioneering scientist Ibn Al-Haytham, and represents 400 years since the invention of the first solar powered technology through the 1615 invention of a prototype solar-driven engine.