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Idiosyncratic Usage in Physiology Objectives

The publication by the American Physiological Society (APS) of objectives as an instructional aide provides a useful service for faculty members preparing teaching materials (1). Ideally, these objectives provide guidance in selecting topics to present or emphasize. However, careful editing of the objectives is important to avoid the inclusion of idiosyncratic or obscure terminology that may cause confusion and wasted effort. For example, consider the following objective:

GI 85. Contrast the colonic motor activity during a “mass movement” with that during haustral shuttling and the consequence of each type of colonic motility.

The phrase “haustral shuttling” does not appear in the section on colonic motility or in the index of four current popular textbooks of medical physiology (2–6), although the discussion of colonic motility in the monograph by Barrett (2) apparently explains the concept. A search for “haustral shuttling” in Highwire (including PubMed) and Google Scholar yielded only one reference (7), which was published in 1975. The introduction to this article mentions haustral shuttling, without any explanation, and refers to an abstract published in *Gut* in 1969 (8). This abstract concerns the issue of whether or not the haustra represent fixed anatomical structures, but it does not contain the phrase haustral shuttling. There, the trail ends.

Although the APS objectives primarily emphasize consensus topics that should be covered in a medical physiology course, it seems likely that this example is not the only obscure term that can be found therein. Faculty members using the objectives would provide a valuable service if they called attention to other such examples as they come upon them.

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Reply

First, I would like to thank Dr. Brand for his comments and the supporting documentation. The Medical Physiology Curriculum Objectives is a joint project of the American Physiological Society (APS) and the Association of Chairs of Departments of Physiology (ACDP).

As with any discipline, Medical Physiology is evolving in terminology and content. When the Objectives project was completed in 2002, the ACDP instituted a periodic review plan to insure that the project remains current.

The current ongoing revision of the project is being headed by Robert G. Carroll (Department of Physiology, East Carolina University School of Medicine) and L. Gabriel Navar (Department of Physiology, Tulane University School of Medicine). Dr. Carroll keeps a file of all recommendations for additions, deletions, and modifications of the learning objectives. Dr. Navar, through the ACDP, convenes an expert panel to periodically review and update one or more sections (Renal in 2005 and Cardiovascular and Respiratory in 2006). The review panel is provided with any suggestions and comments that have been passed onto Dr. Carroll. The revised objectives are presented to the ACDP and, if approved, are posted to the APS Education website (<http://www.the-aps.org/education>).

Any comments about individual objectives or the project may be e-mailed directly to Dr. Carroll (carrollr@ecu.edu) or posted at the APS Archive of Teaching Resources [Search for Medical Physiology Learning Objectives (Object #165) and look for “Post a Comment” at the bottom of the Fact Sheet].

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