

Rica, urbanization caused a marked shift in dietary and exercise patterns with a concomitant increase in cardiovascular risk factors,¹ and at a global level such changes have been emphasized by Yusuf and colleagues.² We agree that the recommendations of Wald and Law³ may not be appropriate in a primary prevention setting. The risk reduction estimates calculated by Wald and Law may be overly optimistic and could distract attention from an unambiguous message promoting exercise, diet, weight reduction and smoking cessation.

Hugh Hindle points out the dilemma caused by elevation of cholesterol in asymptomatic elderly patients. As he notes, most of their risk is attributable to age, and cholesterol reduction might not be expected to yield a marked decrease in cardiovascular disease in a primary prevention setting. This finding is echoed by the relatively small benefit observed in the PROSPER (PROspective Study of Pravastatin in the Elderly at Risk) study, in which pravastatin (40 mg/day) was given to elderly subjects.⁴ However, many guidelines are available for the treatment of high cholesterol, and the 1998 guidelines cited by Hindle are now somewhat out of date. The Canadian guidelines,⁵ which are offered in a single-page format for ease of use, are based on data from recent studies and are among the most aggressive of currently available guidelines.

Jacques Genest

Working Group on Dyslipidemia and
Coronary Artery Disease Prevention
Montréal, Que.

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Competing interests: The author has received speaker fees from various drug companies, including those that manufacture drugs used to treat dyslipidemia and cardiovascular disease; he has also been a member of advisory boards of various drug companies.

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Letters from Egypt

My coeditor, Philip Teigen, and I thank Mark Clarfield for his review¹ of our volume *Dearest G... Yours WO: William Osler's Letters from Egypt to Grace Revere Osler*.

Clarfield comments on the derivation of the term "khamsin." We had 2 Egyptologists check the manuscript, one of whom pointed out that there were several views regarding this word and its meaning, which depended on local interpretation. He stated that the one to which we referred was probably as valid as any.

Lawrence D. Longo

Director, Center for Perinatal Biology
Loma Linda University School of
Medicine
Loma Linda, Calif.

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1. Clarfield AM. Osler on the Nile [book review]. *CMAJ* 2004;170(5):833.

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[The author responds:]

Various sources, including the BBC's weather Web site,¹ the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*² and 2 dictionaries

(one in English³ and the other a standard Arab-English work⁴) all attribute the origin of the word "khamsin" to the Arabic term for "fifty." This approximates the number of days these blasted winds torture those of us who live in the Middle East.

Beyond these citations, however, there is an even stronger refutation of the explanation offered by the Egyptologists that Longo and his coauthor consulted, that the word is derived from the Arabic for "five" (supposedly referring to the fifth month, May, "when the storms are at their worst"). Unlike the Jewish and secular calendars, the Muslim calendar is based on the lunar cycle and thus has no standard fifth month (or any numeric month, for that matter) occurring in the same season of each year. As such, Islam's holy days take place in different seasons each year, and the fifth month rotates around the Gregorian calendar.

I would like to repeat (as I mentioned in my original review⁵) that this small error can hardly be said to detract significantly from this excellent book, which I once again highly recommend to readers of *CMAJ*.

A. Mark Clarfield

Ben Gurion University of the Negev
Beersheva, Israel

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