

What's in a Name?

LINDA MA, A FOURTH-YEAR MEDICAL student from Seattle, Washington, recently collaborated with hand surgeon Kevin C. Chung, M.D., on a research project exploring the origin of medical eponyms — diseases, procedures and anatomical structures named for people, usually the scientists who first wrote about them. Their paper, “In Defense of Eponyms,” appeared in the *Journal of Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery* in May.

INTERVIEW BY WHITLEY HILL
PHOTO BY J. ADRIAN WYLIE

“

IN LECTURES I'D LEARNED THE eponyms but never really thought about them. We use these terms all the time in clinic or the OR. Where did they come from, and what place do they hold in medicine today?

“Aside from being easy to use and remember, eponyms are a poignant reminder of the humanism of medicine, of the contributions and dedication of our predecessors. To have an eponym is one of the highest honors in the medical field.

“This project showed me the legacy of medical history that I, as a new physician, will inherit, and how it will always be important to understand and respect the past.”

—LINDA MA

