Letter to the editor: the origin of “Baum’s loop”

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To the editor,

We were recently contacted by email in regards to a potential error on the eponymous naming of the dorsal bundle of the optic radiation, which has also been given the name “Baum’s loop” [1, 4].

A search of online databases (PubMed, MeSH On Demand, Google Scholar, Google Books) for the term “Baum’s loop” reveals the earliest use in textbooks in 2011 [4], and in peer-reviewed journals in 2012 [2]. Since then, we have identified the term published in ten scientific articles (nine being peer-reviewed) and in six textbooks including the high-profile textbook, Gray’s Surgical Anatomy—First Edition [1].

Wikipedia’s “Optic radiation” article was started in 2004 and progressively expanded. The text “(also called “Baum’s loop”)” was added as an eponym on 18 October 2009 by an anonymous user [5]. After some internet-sleuthing, we contacted a medical doctor via email who confirmed it was indeed them who inserted “Baum’s loop” as an eponym into the Wikipedia article (personal communication: A. Baum, 21 May 2020). This addition was against Wikipedia’s verifiability policy that its content comes from previously published information and despite the addition of “Baum’s loop” as an eponym being flagged by Wikipedia’s editors requesting a citation be added, the term persisted in the article for unknown reasons and from there propagated into the wider medical literature.

Although this is perhaps a trivial footnote in the naming of anatomical structures, which we note are often not named after the original discoverer or inventor [3], given its origin and in-line with the discouragement of eponyms in anatomy [6], we believe the use of “Baum’s loop” as an eponym for the dorsal bundle of the optic radiation should also be discouraged.

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