exclude a clinically significant benefit of supplementation owing to the relatively wide confidence intervals around our estimate of effect.

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When I use a word

Faux amis

An English rugby fan, in Paris for a Six Nations match, wants a beer. He doesn't know that beer is served in *un café* or *un bistro*, but asks the concierge for a pub. The concierge is puzzled. *La pub* means publicity (*il aime beaucoup la pub*), not a public house. OK, what about *une maison publique*? Ah, now the concierge understands. She points out the nearby red light district.

Our friend has fallen foul of the phenomenon known as faux amis, or false friends, foreign words that seem to mean one thing but actually mean another. The term was put on the map in a dictionary called *Les Faux Amis, ou les Trahisons du Vocabulaire Anglais*, by Maxine Koessler and Jules Derocquigny (Librairie Vuibert, 1928). The French word *sensible*, for example, means not sensible (*sage, raisonnable*) but sensitive, a meaning that we recognise in Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility*. And faux amis are not limited to French. In Spanish *simpatía* means friendship not sympathy. In Dutch *een verloren hoop*, the origin of the English phrase "a forlorn hope," actually means a lost troop of soldiers. And when in Germany it does well to remember that *Gift* means a poison not a present (*Geschenk*) and when visiting a pharmaceutical factory that *Präservativ* means a condom not a preservative (*Konservierungsmittel*).

Doctors travelling in France may need to be aware of some medical faux amis. *La médecine libérale* is not, alas, free at the point of delivery; in fact, quite the reverse—it means private practice, since the members of *les professions libérales* are those who receive fees for their labours. And *un médecin de permanence* is not a doctor with a tenured position but merely one who is on duty.

Looking for over the counter drugs? Don't ask for *une droguerie*, which is a hardware store. What you want is *une pharmacie*. And when you're there ask for

médicaments, not *drogues*, unless you want to risk arrest. If it's prescription drugs you're after, go to the doctor's surgery (*cabinet*, not *chirurgie*) and ask for *une ordonnance*, not *une prescription*, which is a chit for a medical appliance or simply an instruction. If the doctor refers you to the hospital don't ask for *la clinique*; that means a private hospital, not an outpatient clinic.

If you're an academic and have been invited to speak at a symposium, don't say that you have come to give *une lecture* (a reading), but *une conférence* (a lecture). And for those lecturing on Viagra, *impotent* means crippled, not impotent, which is *impuissant*.

As bad as these false friends are, worse perhaps are fickle friends, which sometimes mean what you think they mean and sometimes not. *Tension*, for instance, means tension, but also blood pressure and sometimes high blood pressure. And in the family planning clinic try to remember that *fertilité* refers to the land; the word you want there is *fécondité*.

After all of which, I think I need a quick one at *la maison publique*.

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