LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Filological Notes in Electrocardiography

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To the Editor:

The expression "ventricular extrasystole," coined for the first time by Engelman in 1895 to describe a premature impulse with origin in ectopic ventricular focus is often replaced with another meant to be equivalent but which is less correct (as often remembered in past times) "premature ventricular contraction," abbreviated as PVC.

The substantive "contraction" referring to a mechanical event is somewhat improper, because the ventricular extrasystole is an electrical event that is often translated in contraction, but not necessarily. In fact, some extrasystoles remain confined to the ectopic focus without reaching the surrounding ventricular myocardium (concealed ventricular extrasystole).

Also the adjective "premature" is inappropriate because the ventricular extrasystole can be manifested in the late phase of the diastole (end diastolic ventricular extrasystole) or invade the myocardium at the same time as the sinus beat (fusion beat).

Moreover the complete expression "ventricular premature contraction" is not specific. When the ventricular tachycardia rate is relatively slow, a supraventricular impulse determining a capture of the ventricles also can be considered a PVC. In addition, the beat with anterograde conduction through an accessory pathway in pre-excitation represents a ventricular premature contraction.

Besides, the terms bigeminy, trigeminy, and quadrigeminy, used to describe the allorhythmic distribution of the ventricular extrasystoles, are still less opportune, because they are not etymologically correct. In clinical practice with a bigeminy we often describe improperly a sinus beat alternated with an extrasystole, and with trigeminy an extrasystole following two sinus beats.

The term bigeminy does not indicate an extrasystolia bigemina but only sinus beats distributed two by two. Bigeminy means two pairs from the Latin *bi* = double and *gemini* = twin. Therefore bigeminy is for twin doubles, that is, two pairs; in the same way, trigeminy for a triple pair. The extrasystolic bigeminy would be characterized by the presence of two sinus QRS complexes between one ventricular extrasystole and another, and trigeminy from three sinus QRS complexes between one ventricular and another, an event which is verified only in the case of interpolated ventricular extrasystole.

Even if it is difficult to coin in terminology a word or phrase for expressing a concept in a simple and precise way, physicians and scientists should remember the principle of Riccardo from Venosa: "*Conveniunt rebus nomina saepe suis.*"¹

REFERENCES

1. Riccardo da Venosa (XIII sec.), *De Paulino et Polla*, v. 412.