Coumadin Versus Warfarin

To the Editor:

I hate to write a letter to the editor to comment on another letter to the editor, especially if the author of the latter is a respected colleague of mine. However, in this case, I must make an important point regarding conformity to accepted writing style.

Ferguson in his sobering letter on the Organization to Assess Strategies for Ischemic Syndromes (OASIS) pilot study used the words coumadin and warfarin interchangeably, without initially capitalizing the word Coumadin. Coumadin is the trademarked or brand name for the drug whose generic name is warfarin.

The Instructions to Authors of Circulation specify that generic rather than trademarked names be given. In addition, according to the American Medical Association Manual of Style,2 “Proprietary names (trademarks or brand names) use initial capitals... When both the nonproprietary (or generic) and proprietary (or brand) names are listed in the text, the nonproprietary names should be listed first, with the proprietary names capitalized and in parentheses.”

Incidentally, warfarin itself is a hybrid word incorporating an acronym of the patent holder, Wisconsin Alumni Research Foundation, together with the suffix “-arin,” denoting a relation to coumarin.

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Response

Dr Cheng is absolutely correct in pointing out the distinction between the generic name warfarin and the trade name Coumadin. The original Organization to Assess Strategies for Ischemic Syndromes (OASIS) pilot study article1 correctly used the term warfarin throughout, but it did not specify the drug supplier. My letter2 did not.

For readers interested in learning more about the history of drug development, including aspirin, heparin, warfarin, and thrombolytic agents, a review by Mueller and Schneider3 provides a wonderful overview. I promise to reread it.

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