

Emphasis on the First Syllable

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“Emphasis on the first syllable. Rhymes with kennel.” This is my well-seasoned response when asked how to pronounce my last name. At the start of each school year when our children were growing up, our children would annually complain at the dinner table about how badly our last name was pronounced by the new teacher. Invariably our children would follow with, “Yeah, we know Dad! Emphasis on the first syllable. Rhymes with kennel.”

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My last name used to be longer and significantly more nuanced in pronunciation. Family legend has it that my paternal grandfather, fleeing from World War I, emigrated from Poland at age 14 years and could not write or spell his last name in English. On arrival in the United States, the coal mining company that hired him signed his last name with the single letter Z. My grandfather went directly to work, did not go to high school or college, and, unfortunately, died before I was born. Family legend also states that when my father went to school, either the administration or my father changed our family’s last name to make it easier for others to spell and pronounce. (Unfortunately, when he changed the name by placing a single n in the middle, he did not realize that most people on first glance would emphasize the second syllable on pronunciation.) College was out of the question for my father when he graduated from high school; he worked as an accountant for a brewery, but was soon drafted when the United States entered World War II. Thanks to the post-war GI Bill, my father received a college education, which, in turn, led to opportunities, a successful career, a family, my birth, my medical education, and me becoming a pediatrician.

According to the Online Merriam-Webster Dictionary, pediatrics is “a branch of medicine dealing with the development, care, and diseases of infants, children, and adolescents.”¹ The word pediatrics derives from the Greek words pais, which means child, and iatros, which means doctor or healer. As pediatricians, our charge is that first syllable, ped. As pediatricians, we strive to provide an environment best suited for a child’s optimal development. As pediatricians, we care for all children from all backgrounds.

The mission of the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) is “to attain optimal physical, mental, and social health and well-being for all infants, children, adolescents and young adults. To accomplish this, AAP shall support the professional needs of its members.”² One professional need is education, through which we better ourselves and the children we care for. *Pediatrics in Review*, an American Academy of Pediatrics peer-reviewed journal, enters its 40th year of publication. From its inception, *Pediatrics in Review* has been dedicated to educating pediatricians on current, evidence-based, relevant knowledge crucial for the practice of pediatrics throughout the world.

I am both honored and proud to be a pediatrician and the editor-in-chief of *Pediatrics in Review*, and I am very fortunate that I grew up in a place that offered opportunities for personal growth and achievement, a place my grandfather sought at great risk to his life. All I have of my grandfather’s possessions is his coal mining pickaxe, the head of which displays a shallowly engraved Z. I often imagine a lonely, scared, 14-year-old, adolescent boy scratching Z on that rough-surfaced tool as he wondered how to survive in a new country. What he did reminds me that as pediatricians we are dedicated to helping all children in need, especially those from very disadvantaged backgrounds. While I remind others to place the emphasis on the first syllable when pronouncing my last name, I also remind our readers that *Pediatrics in Review*, as it enters its 40th year of publishing, places and will continue to place its emphasis on that “first syllable” in pediatrics: the infant, the child, and the adolescent.

References

1. Meriam-Webster. Pediatrics. Available at: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/pediatrics?src¼search-dict-hed>. Accessed October 13, 2018
2. American Academy of Pediatrics. AAP facts. Available at: <https://www.aap.org/en-us/about-the-aap/aap-facts/Pages/AAP-Facts.aspx>. Accessed October 13, 2018

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