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Myth Meets Medicine: A Quiz on Mythical Maladies

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1. A patient displays a compulsive desire to consume blood (starting with small animals and progressing toward larger sources), believing it will increase their vitality and strength. They prefer nocturnal activity, show fascination with immortality, and exhibit social withdrawal. Historically, similar behaviors have been linked to legends of the undead, particularly in Eastern European folklore. The patient also identifies with a servant-like devotion to a powerful figure associated with blood consumption.

Based on these signs, symptoms, and historical connotations, what condition is being described?

2. Some patients present with excessive hair growth covering the face and body since early childhood, giving a wolf-like appearance. They experience social withdrawal due to their unusual features and are often avoided by others. Historically, individuals with similar appearances were feared and associated with folklore describing humans transforming into wolves, especially during full moons in medieval Europe.

Based on these signs, symptoms, and historical connotations, what condition is being described?

3. A newborn is delivered with the lower limbs fused together into a single structure, resembling a tail. The infant also shows severe abnormalities of the kidneys, bladder, and genital organs, often leading to life-threatening complications shortly after birth. Prenatal imaging had indicated reduced amniotic fluid and poor development of lower body structures. Historically, rare cases with similar physical appearance may have contributed to myths of human-fish hybrids described in ancient maritime folklore.

Based on these signs, symptoms, and historical connotations, what condition is being described?

4. A child presents with recurrent episodes in which objects appear distorted in size—sometimes unusually small (micropsia) or abnormally large (macropsia). They also report altered perception of time, where moments seem to speed up or slow down, along with occasional headaches and visual disturbances. Neurological evaluation suggests a link with migraine activity or viral infection. Historically, such perceptual distortions have been associated with the bizarre and shifting experiences as described by Lewis Carroll in his famous book, where size and reality constantly change.

Based on these signs, symptoms, and historical connotations, what condition is being described?

5. A newborn presents with extremely thick, hardened skin forming large, diamond-shaped plates separated by deep cracks. The skin appears tight and rigid, causing distortion of facial features such as everted eyelids (ectropion) and lips (eclabium). The infant has difficulty feeding and is at high risk of dehydration and infection. Historically, the striking appearance of affected infants has been compared to the patterned costume of Harlequin from the Italian theatrical tradition Commedia dell'arte, known for its diamond-shaped patchwork design.

Based on these signs, symptoms, and historical connotations, what condition is being described?

6. A patient exhibits normal breathing while awake but develops life-threatening episodes of apnoea during sleep, requiring ventilatory support. There is no primary lung or neuromuscular disease, and neurological evaluation suggests a failure of automatic control of breathing. The condition may be present from birth or appear later in life often associated with genetic mutations affecting autonomic regulation. Historically, this disorder has been linked to the legend of



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Ondine, a water nymph who cursed her unfaithful lover so that he would lose the ability to breathe automatically—forcing him to remain awake to survive.

Based on these signs, symptoms, and historical connotations, what condition is being described?

7. A newborn presents with an expressionless face, inability to smile, and difficulty moving the eyes laterally. The infant has trouble sucking and feeding, and as they grow older, they show limited facial expressions despite normal emotional development. Neurological examination reveals congenital paralysis of certain cranial nerves, particularly those controlling facial movement and eye abduction. Historically, individuals with similar features were sometimes misunderstood as being emotionally detached or mask-like, giving rise to misconceptions in earlier medical observations. The condition was later formally described by Paul Julius Möbius.

Based on these signs, symptoms, and historical connotations, what condition is being described?

8. A patient presents with asymmetric overgrowth of bones, skin, and other tissues, leading to disfigurement of the limbs, skull, and torso. They may also have vascular malformations, fatty tumours, and abnormal growth of digits. The overgrowth progresses unevenly over time, resulting in distinctive, unpredictable patterns. Historically, the disorder is named after Proteus, a shape-shifting deity, because the manifestations of the condition change and vary in form, much like the god's ability to assume multiple shapes.

Based on these signs, symptoms, and historical connotations, what condition is being described?

9. A newborn is delivered with a single median eye or a partially divided eye in the centre of the forehead, absence of a normal nose, and severe malformations of the brain and face. Prenatal imaging often reveals holoprosencephaly and other craniofacial anomalies. The condition is typically fatal shortly after birth. Historically, such rare presentations may have inspired the mythological depiction of Cyclops in ancient Greek folklore, creatures known for having a single eye in the middle of the forehead.

Based on these signs, symptoms, and historical connotations, what condition is being described?

10. A patient, often a child or adolescent, presents with sudden, involuntary, rapid, and jerky movements affecting the face, hands, and feet. They may also show emotional lability, irritability, and difficulty with fine motor tasks. The symptoms often appear weeks after a streptococcal infection, such as rheumatic fever. Historically, outbreaks of similar uncontrollable dancing movements were recorded in Europe during the Middle Ages and Renaissance, often referred to as “dancing mania,” and the disorder was later named after Saint Vitus.

Based on these signs, symptoms, and historical connotations, what condition is being described?



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1. Vampirism / Renfield's syndrome
2. Werewolf syndrome / Hypertrichosis
3. Mermaid syndrome
4. Alice-in-Wonderland Syndrome
5. Harlequin ichthyosis
6. Ondine's curse
7. Moebius Syndrome
8. Proteus syndrome
9. Cyclopia
10. St. Vitu's Dance

Answers



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