

SUBDERMATOGLYPHIC: A NEW ISOGRAM

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Dmitri Borgmann has informed us in the February 1974 and May 1985 **Word Ways** that the longest English-language isograms (words without repeated letters) are UNCOPYRIGHTABLE and DERMATOGLYPHICS, each with fifteen letters. Although the former word uses all six vowels, the latter does not, as it lacks U. An affixed form of either the word or its adjectival cousin, the 14-letter DERMATOGLYPHIC, seemed scientifically and linguistically plausible, employing this unused vowel.

Dermatoglyphics is the science of skin patterns, especially fingerprints, and a textbook on the topic was published in 1976: *Dermatoglyphics in Medical Disorders*, by R. Schaumann and M. Alter (Springer-Verlag; New York, Heidelberg, Berlin, 258 pp.). A careful review of this treatise, however, uncovered no other forms than the base word and the adjective noted above.

Last year, I discussed this matter with an old high-school and college friend, Dr. Lowell A. Goldsmith, who is professor and chairman of the Department of Dermatology at the University of Rochester (New York). Several possibilities were discussed and rejected, including "undermatoglyphic" -- scars on the fingers could take the form of ridges which were not part of the genetically programmed fingerprint-ridges and might then be termed "undermatoglyphic" ridges, but a more likely term would be the non-isogram word "non-dermatoglyphic," probably hyphenated, at that. Much more promising was a term for the skin directly underlying the ridges.

Dr. Goldsmith, who is an authority on clinical and research dermatology, published an article in the September 1990 issue of the *Archives of Dermatology* (Volume 126, pp. 1159-1160). This journal is a publication of the American Medical Association and the article is titled "Chaos: To See a World in a Grain of Sand and a Heaven in a Wild Flower", where he looks, among other things, at the implications of fractal geometry for the field of dermatology. He writes "The set of patterns that are the fine whorls, arches, and other finger-ridges probably have an underlying dermal subdermatoglyphic matrix determining their distribution."

Many legitimate words appearing in medical journals or books are not to be found in even the most detailed medical dictionaries; such words are nearly all compounded of well-known roots, prefixes and suffixes. The word SUBDERMATOGLYPHIC does stand a chance to blossom beyond this single citation if Dr. Goldsmith and his colleagues pursue their thoughts and investigations. In fact, eventual dictionary entry is not an unreasonable expectation.