Prophylactic Cranial Irradiation in Small-Cell Lung Cancer: Is it Still Controversial or Is it a No-Brainer?
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Prophylactic Cranial Irradiation in Small-Cell Lung Cancer: Is it Still Controversial or Is it a No-Brainer?

To the Editor and Author:

I read your paper in The Oncologist on brain irradiation in S.C.L.C. I was very confused by the title—what does the slang phrase “no-brainer” mean? As an Englishman, I took it to mean “stupid, unintelligent, not worthy of thought, etc.” Apparently it means, after my reading the paper, exactly the opposite, namely “obvious, not requiring discussion, etc., etc.” I cannot find the phrase in my large dictionary.

With respect, such a slang phrase, officially undefined has no place in a serious scientific paper.

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REFERENCES


Dr. Turrisi replies:

You remarked that ‘no-brainer’ was unfamiliar and you divined it to mean “not worthy of thought” which is precisely what I was getting at. At the end, you concluded it meant “not requiring discussion or obvious.” I think my discussion of the subject was that the argument has been badly conceived by too many, and that if one clearly looks at the issues, it really is no longer worthy of thought, but very obvious—all after much discussion of the seemingly confounding arguments.

An example of the use of “no-brainer” can be found in a recent article from The New Yorker, “Working Titles: the Trouble with Sitcoms [1].” The phrase can also be found in the Cambridge Dictionary of American English: herein it describes the phrase as an American idiom in the common parlance since the 1980s. I must say I do not know the etymology of it, but the juxtaposition of the “no-brainer” meaning with the brain treatment was too good to pass up—at least for me.

I’ll close with a quote describing Marcel Proust’s taste in writing. “Every writer is obliged to create his own language, as every violinist is obliged to create his own ‘tone’... I don’t mean to say that I like original writers who write badly. I prefer—and perhaps it is a weakness—those who write well. But they begin to write well only on the condition that they are original, that they create their own language [2].”

So, I’ll have to respectfully disagree about its place in a scientific paper. Science and medicine, as well as literature, need to be thought provoking and interesting. Dullness and cliché are not the mark of good scientific writing or great literature. Originality and thought provocation were my aims, I think your letter proves that I hit my mark rather well.

Andrew T. Turrisi, III, M.D.

REFERENCE

References

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