Got the Gout, Ebenezer? Why It Remains a Subject of Ridicule

By Hank Campbell — May 3, 2016

Gout was long considered a disease for the nobility, since wealthy people who ate rich foods were most likely to get it. Perhaps that is why it remains a subject of ridicule; it is not only something they did to themselves but provides another way to launch cultural salvos at successful people, whom we are being taught to hate by media.

And journalists, invariably working for large corporations run by very wealthy people, perhaps can't resist the opportunity to take indirect jabs at their bosses. In a new paper, gout was found to be the subject of humor in 26.3 percent of articles analyzed.

And perhaps because medicine makes diseases seem exculpatory -- not to mention rampant belief in the naturalistic fallacy that different food can cure anything -- dietary interventions were over-emphasized in comparison to effective medication. For those reasons, gout was a topic of embarrassment in 23.7 percent of articles in the 21 highest circulation newspapers in the United Kingdom and United States between 2010 and 2015.

We now know gout is caused by too much uric acid in the blood as purines break down, not just because someone ate scallops and wine. Too much uric acid forms hard crystals in joints which leads to inflammation and pain. Certainly being obese and eating foods high in purines will aggravate the chances of getting it, but genetics account for up to 80 percent of why people get it.

So be a little nicer the next time a study of gout comes out, journalists. Not calling people with it Ebenezer might be a good place to start.

Citation: Stefanie D Duyck, Keith J Petrie and Nicola Dalbeth, “You don't have to be a drinker to have gout, but it helps”: A content analysis of the depiction of gout in popular newspapers, Arthritis Care & Research, 1 MAY 2016, DOI: 10.1002/acr.22879 [1]