Index of suspicion or clinical awareness?

To the Editor:

I enjoyed reading the article "Lobar torsion after pulmonary resection: Presentation and outcome," by Cable and colleagues (*J Thorac Cardiovasc Surg.* 2001;122:1091-3). However, I object to the expression "high index of suspicion" used in the "Conclusions" section of the abstract.

This is a stereotyped expression, a cliché. Instead of writing about "acute clinical awareness" or "high level of suspicion," both of which are linguistically correct and

have precise meaning, authors of many articles and books expose us all too often to some meaningless "index." What is an index? Of several available definitions, I have chosen two:

1. Index is a number associated with another number to indicate a mathematical operation.
2. Index is a ratio derived from a series of observations and used as an indicator of measure.

In both definitions "index" is a *number* with certain meaning. Can *acute clinical awareness* or *high level of suspicion* be ex-

pressed in a number? Can a number indicate how suspicious we are? How high is a "high index of suspicion?" Is it 10? Is it 100?

Scientific journals should use correct and precise language, and a good starting point for editors would be to dispose of meaningless "indexes."

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