

## NOMEN EST OMEN: MEDICAL AND PHARMACEUTICAL OCCUPATIONS IN SLOVENIAN FAMILY NAMES

### NOMEN EST OMEN: MEDICINSKA I FARMACEUTSKA ZANIMANJA U SLOVENSKIM PREZIMENIMA

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#### SUMMARY

*The heritage of Slovenian house names and surnames reflects, among others, the former medicine and pharmaceutical occupations, midwifery, and folk medicine practices, and besides that, also health status and illnesses of people. Surnames, which are especially strongly intertwined with family, local and social history, are closely related to folk medicine and magic. Unlike house names (vulgo), which are the usual nicknames for physical and mental characteristics and abilities, surnames denote medicals occupations and medicinal folk practice as such. According to the most recent data (as of January 1, 2020) of The Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia, at least 40 surnames reminiscent former medical or pharmaceutical professions. These newly discovered digital data in open access are precious for the history of medicine because they allow comparing surnames geographically, by frequency, and through the time.*

**Keywords:** *surname, house name, folk medicine, medicinal occupation, pharmacy, Slovenia*

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## ON SURNAMES DERIVED FROM OCCUPATIONS

In Slovenia, last names were established in the 16<sup>th</sup> century among the peasantry, and earlier in the bourgeoisie and nobility. In the Slovenian onomastics, surnames are traditionally divided into four groups according to their meaning: 1. Surnames deriving from birth names (e.g. from ancient pre-Christian names, from saints' names, from baptismal names), 2. Surnames deriving from occupational names, crafts, and activities, 3. Surnames deriving from local, provincial, and ethnic names, 4. Surnames deriving from nicknames (e.g. from house names or according to physical or character characteristics like colour of skin or hair)<sup>1</sup>.

Occupational surnames indicate an occupation, craft or craft activity, as well as temporary employment of the first holder of such surname. The socio-political situation of Slovenian people in the city and the countryside during the feudal era, when almost every major settlement had its mayor, blacksmith, weaver, shoemaker, innkeeper, miller and wheeler, explain why the surnames, derived from occupations, are so common. Many surnames have two forms, Slovenian and German, sometimes they are also in Italian, Friulian or Hungarian language. This is because foreign lords have written down the surnames in their land and tax registers (in Slovenian *urbar*) in both languages. Whoever said his or her name and profession before the authority, the authority wrote down the name of the profession as a last name. The use of foreign surnames was supported by everyday linguistic use because Slovenian people, under the influence of ruling foreigners, called craftsmen with foreign terms. In doing so, the foreign surname remained on paper, but the people used the Slovenian name. In some places, there has been a long struggle between the local and foreign names, which of them will eventually prevail. Many surname variations have evolved from the occupational names.<sup>2</sup>

## ON THE MEDICINAL OCCUPATIONS IN SLOVENIA

In a historical region Carniola, faculty-trained doctors were not known until 1516. Their hierarchy was as follows: the highest was *medicus*, then *ra-nocelnik* – city surgeon, body-surgeon, barber-surgeon and quack doctor who

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<sup>1</sup> Torkar, Silvo (2002). Priimki na Slovenskem, *Jezikoslovni zapiski: zbornik Inštituta za slovenski jezik Frana Ramovša* 8(2), 71, 73, 75.

<sup>2</sup> Bunc, Stanko (1963). O nastanku, razvoju in pomenu priimkov, *Jezik in slovstvo* 8(6), 175, 176.

performed the simplest surgeries. Peasants usually did not call the foreign doctors, because they were too expensive for them and often unavailable linguistically. Healthcare of the majority of the population was in the hands of the lower layer of doctors, secular, and convent surgeons. The surgeons learned their crafts with older experienced masters. It was not until the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century that the authorities required regular exams at educational institutions from the healers (*ranocelniki*). They used to prepare and sell medicine and various mystical and magical remedies.<sup>3</sup> The barber-surgeons were craftsman and were organised in guilds. The interrogated surgeons differed from other surgeons in that where they were finally questioned: in college, at the guild's tribunal, or before the doctors. Towards the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, surgery became equivalent to other medical professions. The status of the surgeon equalled that of other physicians. In Austria, in 1784, Emperor Joseph II. ordered that internal medicine should be combined with surgery.<sup>4</sup> In 1888, there were few educated doctors, and in 1890 there were exactly 50 in Carniola. In addition, there were 27 healers and about 350 midwives. There were 5,913 patients per one doctor in Carniola, which at that time had a population of almost half a million. In the other administrative provinces of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, it was worse only in Galicia (7,005 patients per doctor) and Bukovina (7,129 patients per doctor). In Styria, one doctor took care of 2,276 patients, in Carinthia 3,225, in Gorizia 4,555, and Trieste with its surroundings 1,403 patients.<sup>5</sup> The population suffered greatly from illnesses and accidents due to a lack of doctors. The economic consequences of this situation were also severe. The work of fake midwives flourished, and many childbirths ended tragically because of unexamined midwives.

Until the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, academically educated physicians gained the confidence of the people with difficulty. Only a doctor who knew the techniques of folk healers succeeded, above all if he knew how to diagnose diseases with palpation, urine examination, bloodletting, etc. Even in these cases, the poor material condition of the majority of the population caused people to resort to healers rather than academically educated doctors. The

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<sup>3</sup> Kotnik, France (1952). Iz ljudske medicine. In: Grafenauer, Ivan, Orel, Boris (Eds.). *Narodopisje Slovencev II*. Ljubljana; Klas 127.

<sup>4</sup> Borisov, Peter (1999). O Hacquetovem značaju (zgodovinsko - psihološka študija). *Zgodovinski časopis* 53(4), 461.

<sup>5</sup> Zupanc, Franz (1893). *Krain und seine öffentliche Gesundheit vom Jahre 1881 bis inclusive 1890 mit besonderer Berücksichtigung des Jahres 1890*. Laibach; Druck und Verlag von Ig. v. Kleinmayr & Fed. Bamberg, 178.

doctors were more expensive and prescribed the costly medicines, and on the contrary, the healers advised the patients to use homemade remedies and herbs that were cheap or even free. Some folk doctors were known for their “specialisations”, for example, for a sprain, broken bones, for the treatment of spells, oedema, tuberculosis, snakebite, rheumatism, and the like. They were also visited by patients who were several days away. They were allowed to receive a payment if patients offered it themselves, and some folk healers were wealthy<sup>6</sup>. Usually, folk healers carefully hid their knowledge so that they retained a kind of monopoly in healing, and many just handed over their books of spells and other books to their sons or relatives when they were on the deathbed.<sup>7</sup>

#### ON THE ORIGINS AND REMAINS OF MEDICINAL HERITAGE IN FAMILY AND HOUSE NAMES IN SLOVENIA

The activity of folk healers was transmitted in various ways and became part of the local heritage and folk culture. The remnants of past healthcare activity are preserved in house names, such as *at Bali* (derived from archaic term *balovati*, *balusati*, to heal), *at Lečnik* (derived from *lek*, *zdravilo*; *lečnik* is an obsolete word for a doctor)<sup>8</sup>. The word *bali* is known to all Slavic languages. Originally, it has the same meaning as a sorcerer (*vrač*): someone who heals with words. The Freising manuscripts (*Brižinski spomeniki*, the first Latin-script of a continuous text in the Slavic language and the oldest document in Slovenian language, probably written in the 9<sup>th</sup> century) still know the word in this sense, but later its meaning was changed. The memory of the word *bali* has remained in other archaic words, such as: *baje*, *bajanica*, *bajanje*, *bajati*, *bajže*, *basin*, *bajavec*<sup>9</sup>. Some surnames *Bajc*, *Bajec*, *Basnava* and *Čare* are preserved and present in the Western part of Slovenia, and they derive from the verbs *bajati* (to heal) and *čarati* (to spell)<sup>10</sup>. They testify that there is a thousand-year presence of (old) Slovenian words doctor and medicine, which got its place in family and house names.

Secondly, before the Second World War people from Dravsko Polje and Slovenske Gorice in the Eastern part of Slovenia used to say that they go to

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<sup>6</sup> Möderndorfer, Vinko (1964). *Ljudska medicina pri Slovencih = Volksmedizin bei den Slowenen*, Ljubljana; Slovenska akademija znanosti in umetnosti, 9.

<sup>7</sup> Dolenc, Milan (1973). *Ljudske medicinske knjige iz okolice Škofje Loke. Loški razgledi* 20, 70.

<sup>8</sup> Möderndorfer, Vinko (1964), 7, 8.

<sup>9</sup> Kotnik, France (1952), 122.

<sup>10</sup> Merkú, Pavle (2004). *1300 primorskih priimkov*, Trst; Mladika, 63.

the pharmacy to get *vraštvo* (remedy, medicine), which would cure their illness since *vračiti* is an old term for healing. The man who healed was called *vrač* or *vračnik*, and a woman was *vračnica* or *vračarica*.<sup>11</sup> The healer, *vrač*, called for supernatural forces to nullify spells and curses they believed to harm health.

The Slovenian word for *vrač* has the same meaning in other Slavic languages. For instance: in Russian, *vrač* means *tselitel*; in Belarusian is a *liekar*; in Croatian *ljudski zdravnik*, *mazač*; *vedeževalec*, *bogovec*, *vražar* and *čarovnik*; he is a *iscelitelj* in Bosnian language; *iscelitelj*; in Macedonian; *iscelitelj*, *mag*, *žrec* in Serbian; in Bulgarian he is a *lechitel*; in Czech *léčitel*; in Slovak *liečiteľ*, in Polish *uzdrowiciel* and Ukrainian *tsilytel*. The same connotations apply to Germanic languages. In English he is a *witch doctor*, *shaman*, *medicine man*, *root doctor*, *leaf doctor*, *conjure man*, *healer*; in German *der Medizinmann*, *der Heilpraktiker* and *der Regenmacher*, in Norwegian, Swedish and Danish *healer*, in Dutch *heler*, in Icelandic *heilari*. In the Romanic languages, in French, the *vrač* is *guérisseur*, *charlatan*, *médicastre*; in Spanish *curandero*, in Portuguese and Catalan *curador*, in Romanian *vindecător*. There is *kuracanto* in Esperanto; in Basque *healer*, in Greek *therapeftis*, that is, a therapist; and in Latin *medicus*, hence the doctor.

The given two examples and language comparisons show us that the word healer has multiple meanings and that it depends on the time and other socio-historical circumstances in which it was used. The common to all denominations is the treatment of humans and animals where the experiential and magical methods of healing were orally transmitted from one person to another and through transcripts of folk medicine books. In addition to using herbs, animals, and minerals, the healers also used preventive and curative magic to prevent contact with evil spirits and to drive them out. It is assumed that they had supernatural power and could also influence the weather. The healers could also intentionally harm people. Today the word *vrač* is considered mostly offensive and degrading. Many times it is replaced with a more correct one, such as a traditional healer (*zdravilec*). In professional ethnomedical descriptions of healing in the Slovenian territory, some authors often use a restrained or worsening tone towards such healing. In the table below, we can see the aforementioned multi-meaning.

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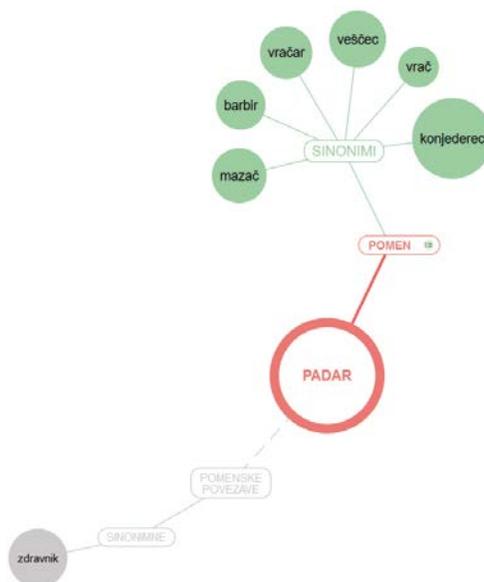
<sup>11</sup> Kotnik, France (1952), 123.

VRAČ
= vračitelj = vračnik = vračuh = vračin = šaman = žrec = svečenik = mag = čarovnik = copernik = čarnik = čarman = čare = zagovornik = zagovarjavec = vedež = bali = incantator = besednik, ki beseduje in z besedo zdravi = bajavec = bogovec = mazač = mazec = šarlatan = padar = medicus (16 <sup>th</sup> Century) = der Heilpraktiker (Eastern Styria) = der Quacksalber = der Charlatan = lekar = lečnik = ranocel(n)ik = ranarnik = bukovnik medicinske stroke = arcat = zdravljajč = der Arzt =
HUMAN AND ANIMAL HEALER USING MAGIC (MALE GRAMMATICAL GENDER)
VRAČARICA
= vračilja = vračnica = vračka = vračuhinja = padarica = zagovarjalka = mazačka = šarlatanka = zdravarica = die Quacksalberin = die Heilkunstlerin = die Heilerin =
HUMAN AND ANIMAL HEALER USING MAGIC (FEMALE GRAMMATICAL GENDER)

Figure 1. Terms used in Slovenia at various times for folk healer (masculine and female grammatical form) in the database of Slovenian synonyms (<http://sinonimi.si/>) and from the data in the dictionaries on the Fran Web portal (<https://fran.si/>) including: *Slovar slovenskega knjižnega jezika*, *Slovenski pravopis*, *Slovenski etimološki slovar*, *Pleteršnikov Slovensko-nemški slovar*, *Novakov Slovar stare knjižne prekmurščine* and *Besedje slovenskega knjižnega jezika 16. stoletja*. Terms show that German and Latin words were occasionally used instead of Slovenian *vrač* or *vračarica*.

Figure 2: Synonymous meanings in Slovenian language for the word quack doctor (quack; archaic barber-surgeon; mountebank). The database of Slovenian synonyms, <https://sinonimi-graf.fran.si/embed.html?gesloid=034033>, accessed January, 23, 2020.

House names in connection with health and disease in Slovenia indicate the activity of local doctors,



pharmacists or midwives<sup>12</sup>. Such names are, for example: *Padarovi*, *Padarčeva domačija*, *pri Padarji* (*padar* in Slovenian language means quack doctor, quack or is an archaic term for barber-surgeon), *pri Apotekarjih*, *Potikarovi*, *Potekarjevi*, *Potekarovi* (*apoteka* is an old term for pharmacy), *pri Babici*, *pri Babc*, *pri Babci* (*babica* is the term for midwife).

Houses were named according to the physical characteristics of their owners. The research, based on 3,300 Slovenian house names<sup>13</sup>, found that the majority of houses were named after:

- body characteristics, especially on the body and head;
- as a result of injuries;
- because of the speech peculiarities of the house residents.

House names also point to the health problems and injuries of its residents. One of the most frequent namings expresses injuries or possible congenital defects of the legs of the lords of the house. These injuries manifested themselves in limping and consequently using walking crooks (or home-made crutches), hence so many names that describe walking problems. One of the possible explanations of frequent leg injuries is general physical burnout, untreated small injuries, and worn shoes and socks. Some house names denote the inconvenience, caused by involuntary, uncontrollable, repetitive sudden movements, twitches or tics. Slowness and laziness (at work or in general) are also quite noticeable features in Slovenian house names. Physical features are described with a fair amount of humour. Many of them are related to the residents of low height or those who were fatter and bigger. The memory of overweight people is kept in house names as a comparison with round objects, such as instruments (drums) or with plants (pumpkins). The owner's body hair was also a very recognisable feature, with hair, moustache, and beard being the most noticed. The most noticeable hair colours were silver or white and red. A darker complexion was also noticed, hence houses got names after the owner's brown skin tones.<sup>14</sup>

And finally, if we look at today's remains of such naming, we can creatively use the on-line database of house names and surnames of The Statistical Office of Republic Slovenia<sup>15</sup> where Ludwig Wittgenstein's revolutionary

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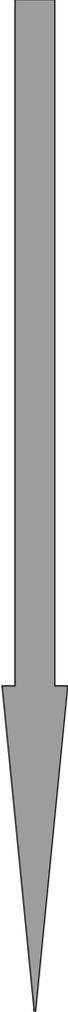
<sup>12</sup> Kapus, Jerica (2011), *Domača hišna imena na Slovenskem – v šolskem letu 1987/88*. Zbral Roman Gašperin. Diplomsko delo. Maribor; Filozofska fakulteta Maribor, Oddelek za slovanske jezike in književnosti.

<sup>13</sup> Kapus, Jerica (2011).

<sup>14</sup> Kapus, Jerica (2011). 107, 108–109, 114, 119, 121, 170, 182, 189, 193, 228, 277.

<sup>15</sup> Statistični urad Republike Slovenije. <https://www.stat.si> (Accessed: 23 January 2020).

idea that “the limits of my language are the limits of my world” comes to power. In the meanings of surnames, relating to former medical professions, former life is captured and preserved. The table below confirms this thought.

Surnames denoting former (folk) medicine and pharmacy activities in the territory of today’s Slovenia (in the brackets is the number of family names, as of January 1, 2020) and the statistical region where this surname is the most frequent.	Frequency (descending)
Likar (1207) Gorizia region	
Bajc (965) Gorizia region	
Bajec (563) Central Slovenia region	
Čarman (372) Central Slovenia region	
Videc (259) Savinja region	
Žavbi (229) Central Slovenia region	
Bajič (206) Central Slovenia region	
Vračko (193) Drava region	
Medic (169) Southeast Slovenia	
Barber (146) Mura region	
Balkovec (124) Southeast Slovenia	
Vračun (98) Lower Sava region	
Lečnik (93) Drava region	
Čarni (86) Mura region	
Padar (73) Central Slovenia region	
Arcet (59) Drava region	
Špitalar (59) Savinja region	
Bajič (54) Mura region	
Medik (51) no region mentioned due to statistical confidentiality / Drava and Mura region, according to Phonebook	
Vračar (44) Central Slovenia region	
Zdravje (39) Central Slovenia region	
Apotekar (36) Savinja region	
Vračevič (35) no region mentioned, less than 5 names / Central Slovenia region according to Phonebook	
Spital (34) no region mentioned due to statistical confidentiality / Savinja region according to Phonebook	
Zdravič (31) Central Slovenia region	
Špital (29) no region mentioned due to statistical confidentiality / Savinja region according to Phonebook	
Travar (29) Gorizia region	
Špitaler (23) Savinja region	

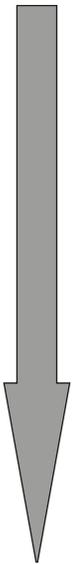
Surnames denoting former (folk) medicine and pharmacy activities in the territory of today's Slovenia (in the brackets is the number of family names, as of January 1, 2020) and the statistical region where this surname is the most frequent.	Frequency (descending)
<b>Leček</b> (20) Mura region	
<b>Vračič</b> (18) Drava region	
<b>Čare</b> (17) Drava region	
<b>Lečić</b> (17) Central Slovenia region	
<b>Vračič</b> (14) no region mentioned due to statistical confidentiality / Drava region according to Phonebook	
<b>Bali</b> (11) Drava region	
<b>Ranik</b> (10) Central Slovenia region	
<b>Mažar</b> (8) Central Slovenia region	
<b>Zdravić</b> (8) no region mentioned due to statistical confidentiality / Central Slovenia region according to Phonebook	
<b>Barbir</b> (7) no region mentioned due to statistical confidentiality / Mura region according to Phonebook	
<b>Bajalo</b> (7) no region mentioned due to statistical confidentiality / Mura region according to Phonebook	
<b>Žaubi</b> (5) no region mentioned due to statistical confidentiality / Savinja region according to the Phonebook	
<b>Lečić</b> (less than 5 names) no region mentioned, less than 5 names / Central Slovenia region according to Phonebook	

Figure 3: Family names connected to the former (folk) medicine and pharmacy occupations in Slovenia in January 2020. Family names were extracted from the database of The Statistical Office of Republic of Slovenia (<https://www.stat.si/ImenaRojstva/en/>; accessed 23 January 2020).

The examples of 40 still existing medicinal occupational family names, both for academic doctors, folk healers (folk magicians), and quacks, point to the ramifications of different medicinal practices of the past. The table shows thirteen (13) occupational surnames, synonyms and archaic terms for skilled medical doctors and pharmacists (they are highlighted in the table): *Likar*, *Medic*, *Balkovec*, *Lečnik*, *Arcet*, *Špitalar*, *Medik*, *Apotekar*, *Špitaler*, *Leček*, *Lečić*, *Bali*, *Lečić*. Two (2) examples denote the institution, the hospital (*Špital*, *Spital*), and only one of all examples is today's term for health (*Zdravje*). At the top of the table is surname *Likar* (an archaic term for a medical doctor and/or a pharmacist) that appears 1207 times. The frequency of people with this surname in 2020 is the highest in the Gorizia region on the west of Slovenia. At the bottom of the list are surnames *Barbir* (an archaic term for barber-surgeon) with the frequency seven (7) existing surnames in 2020 and

*Lečič* with a frequency less than five (<5) existing surnames and no supporting geographical data. The terms listed for medical doctors and folk healers indicate that the medical business was related to magic. It is likely that some were more interested in magic, others in medicine. Thus, some were more involved as physicians, others more as diviners or as general magicians.

The geographic regions are quite evenly distributed among the surnames. The only missing regions in the list are the most southern and the most northern regions of Slovenia, such as Upper Carniola and Carinthia from the north, and Coastal-Karst and Littoral-Inner Carniola. Nevertheless, it would be too soon to conclude that these regions lacked trained medical doctors in the past since we do not have accurate simultaneous data for all periods and all regions. The number of self-taught “doctors” in the statistics is slightly higher than the number of academically educated physicians. This is not surprising, since effective and timely health care in a period without health insurance, predominant inaccessibility of doctors, mistrust of vaccination campaigns, paid health services, folk self-medication, and reliance on mutual help were rare.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Although studies showed that medical doctors and lawyers were disproportionately more likely to have surnames that resembled their professions, and that for doctors, this influence extended to the type of medicine they practised<sup>16</sup>, similar research in Slovenia has not been made. Review of on-line available names of medical doctors (of two Slovenian Faculties of Medicine in Maribor and Ljubljana, University Medical Centres in Maribor and Ljubljana, Community Health Centre Ljubljana, Health Centre Dr. Adolf Drovc Maribor, and some other random Internet searches) shows only a few examples that names could potentially influence medical career choices.

The most interesting curiosity among the findings is surely the discovery of surname *Bali*, which is the oldest and the first known Slovenian word for a medical doctor. Today, at least one physician carries this name. Three other physicians carry general names denoting life and health (*Zdravkovič*, *Živkovič*) or poisons (*Strupi*). Three examples show that there could be a potential connection between the surname and the choice of specialisation, because it was identified that one ophthalmologist’s surname is *Šarenac* (Possibly from

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<sup>16</sup> Abel, Ernest L. (2010), Influence of Names on Career Choices in Medicine, *A Journal of Onomastics* 58(2), 65–74.

Croatian adjective *šaren*, gaily coloured; and/or also from the Slovenian noun *šarenica*, iris). One pathologist is *Krstonošić* (Could it be someone who carries a coffin, since *krsta* is a coffin and *nositi* is to carry? Since there is *ć* at the end, which is not a Slovenian letter, it is more likely that the person carries *krst*, a cross in the Croatian language, and not a coffin, so there is no connection, and my first association was probably too biased). Then, there is one dentist *Škrbinc* (from *škrbina*, dental stub), several physicians are *Fras* (*fras* was an archaic and folk name for cramps in children), one physiotherapist is *Brcar* (from *brcati*, to kick). Other health care personnel have names associated with body parts, such as *Kolenc* (*koleno*, knee) and surgical instruments or tools, such as *Pincetić* (possibly from *pinceta*, in Croatian and Slovenian pincers), and *Cvirn* (*cvirn*, conversationally, thread).

Do these few examples out of around 2,000 examined surnames really prove that *nomen est omen*? In my opinion, the theory of nominative determinism where people tend to gravitate towards areas of work that fit their names is not pronounced enough in these contemporary surnames in relation to medicine in Slovenia. First, there are not enough examples of that, second, they seem to be rather a coincidence than intention, and third, are these physicians aware of historical and linguistic interlacing between their names and occupation.

However, it was not such case in the past when people got names that matched their area of work. Over time the appropriateness of occupational names has decreased because not all descendants followed their ancestors' occupations.

Nevertheless, there is a humorous side attached to the idea that names are peculiarly suited to their owners and that they really influence us that much today. Today, physicians simply had to find their inner *bali* in the process of becoming medical practitioners. The proverb *Nomen est omen* is confirmed in practice when they accomplish their degree and when the professional titles become the self-evident part of their names and identity.

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## SAŽETAK

*Baština slovenskih kućnih imena i prezimena odražava, među ostalim, nekadašnja medicinska i farmaceutska zanimanja, primaljske te narodne medicinske prakse, a uz to i zdravstveno stanje te bolesti ljudi. Prezimena, koja su posebno snažno isprepletana s obiteljskom, lokalnom i društvenom poviješću, usko su povezana s narodnom medicinom i magijom. Za razliku od kućnih imena (vulgo), koja su uobičajeno nadimci za fizičke i mentalne karakteristike i sposobnosti, prezimena označavaju medicinska zanimanja i medicinsku narodnu praksu kao takvu. Prema najnovijim podacima (od 1. siječnja 2020.) Zavoda za statistiku Republike Slovenije, najmanje četrdeset prezimena podsjeća na bivše medicinske ili farmaceutske profesije. Ovi svima dostupni digitalni podaci dragocjeni su za povijest medicine jer omogućuju usporedbu prezimena geografski, po učestalosti i kroz vrijeme.*

**Ključne riječi:** *prezime, ime kuće, narodna medicina, medicinsko zanimanje, farmacija, Slovenija*