

VIEWPOINT

An instructive viewpoint from the Greek mythology

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According to Greek mythology, Apollo fell in love with the mortal princess Coronis from Lakereia in Thessaly, but she eventually chose the affections of the mortal king of Corinth, Ischys.¹ The jealous god killed the pregnant princess but, wishing to save their unborn child, he snatched the baby from the lifeless body of Coronis. The boy was named Asclepius, who, according to Homer, was a real historical figure and was entrusted to the care of Chiron (Fig. 1), who lived in Pilon in Thessaly.² Chiron raised the premature neonate in his cave, where according to the myth, the child lived for a long time. Chiron also introduced Asclepius to the art of healing and taught him the therapeutics of herbs – knowledge that he later passed on to his sons, Machaon and Podaleirius. Legend later transformed Chiron into a centaur (Fig. 2), who, according to Homer, was the fairest of all centaurs.³

Chiron comes from the word 'χειρ' (Chir), meaning hand, and 'χείρον' (Chiron) – having talent in using his hands. The word 'centaur' comes from the Greek words 'κέντω' (kento) meaning puncture and the 'ταύρος' (tavros) meaning bull, an ancient Greek symbol of strength and speed. So, according to Homer, the neonatologist of Greek mythology was (i) an excellent teacher; (ii) had the talent of using his hands; (iii) was strong and very fast; (iv) had profound knowledge of pharmaceuticals; (v) his first patient was Asclepius, the God of Medicine, who was born by the first recorded caesarean section;⁴ (vi) he used his cave in Pilon for raising Asclepius; and (vii) he was the fairest and wisest among his colleagues.

Four thousand years later, the major goal of neonatology training programmes is to produce neonatologists who will pursue careers that combine clinical, research and training responsibilities.⁵ The ideals inherent in the myth surrounding Chiron are still relevant and today's neonatology trainees aspire to support newborns, be fair and teach junior doctors.



Fig. 1 Chiron in an amphora of 520–510 BC. Museum of Louvre, Paris, France.

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Fig. 2 Chiron presented as a centaur in a terracotta statue dating back to the second half of the 10th century BC. Archaeological Museum of Eretria, Island of Euboea, Greece.

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