The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks

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Henrietta Lacks

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Stolen Cells!

Henrietta Lacks

Henrietta Lacks cells were part of research into the genes that cause cancer and those that suppress it. They helped develop drugs for treating leukemias, and led to the discovery of human telomeres, which are essential for cell division.

In 1951, Henrietta Lacks was diagnosed with cervical cancer. She was treated by Dr. Charles H. F. Jenkins, who performed a biopsy and sent the cells to Dr. George Gey at Johns Hopkins University.

Jenkins had a vision of using cancer cells in research, but he needed a consistent supply of cells. He discovered that Henrietta Lacks's cells grew quickly and could be maintained in culture.

Jenkins named the cells HeLa cells, and they became the first immortal human cells. They were used in countless research studies, and their importance was recognized when they were selected as the first cells to be frozen and stored for future use.

Henrietta Lacks was not aware of the use of her cells, and her family was not informed until many years later.

The HeLa cells were used in the research of many scientists, including those who developed the polio vaccine, and helped to develop the first artificial insemination procedures.

The use of the HeLa cells was controversial, and it raised ethical questions about the use of human cells in research.

In 1973, the National Institutes of Health established the Cell Line Bank, which was intended to regulate the use of cell lines and protect the rights of individuals whose cells were used in research.

Today, the HeLa cells continue to be used in research, but the use of human cells in research is carefully regulated and ethical considerations are taken into account.