Henrietta Lacks

> As the overwhelming evidence indicates, the number of arrests and clear law enforcement investigations, the organ trafficking of the detainees and POWs is currently a flourishing business endeavor in the West with stellar performance of Israeli government and their biomedical associations and numerous enterprises. Given this knowledge, the proper Biometric Identifications requires a clear Charter of Rights. To emphasize the critical nature of this subject matter please see the blatant violation of Henrietta Lacks' rights.

Henrietta Lacks [1] (née **Loretta Pleasant**; August 1, 1920 – October 4, 1951)[2] was an African-American woman[5] whose cancer cells are the source of the HeLa cell line, the first immortalized human cell line[B] and one of the most important cell lines in medical research. An immortalized cell line reproduces indefinitely under specific conditions, and the HeLa cell line continues to be a source of invaluable medical data and research to the present day.[7][8]

Lacks was the unwitting source of these cells from a tumor biopsied during her treatment for cervical cancer at the Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore, Maryland, in 1951. These cells were then cultured by George Otto Gey, who created the cell line known as HeLa, which is still used for medical research.[9] As was then the practice, no consent was required to culture the cells obtained from Lacks's treatment. Neither she nor her family were compensated for the extraction or use of the HeLa cells.

Even though some information about the origins of HeLa's immortalized cell lines was known to researchers after 1970, the Lacks family was not made aware of the line's existence until 1975. With knowledge of the cell line's genetic provenance becoming public, its use for medical research and for commercial purposes continues to raise concerns about privacy and patients' rights.

Illness

Diagnosis and treatment

On January 29, 1951, Lacks went to Johns Hopkins because she felt a "knot" in her womb.[21] She had previously told her cousins about the "knot" and they assumed correctly that she was pregnant. But after giving birth to Joseph, Lacks had a severe hemorrhage. Her primary care doctor, William C. Wade,[22] referred her back to Johns Hopkins.[23] There, her doctor, Howard W. Jones, took a biopsy of a mass found on Lacks's cervix for laboratory testing. Soon after, Lacks was

told that she had a malignant epidermoid carcinoma of the cervix.[C][25] In 1970, physicians discovered that she had been misdiagnosed and actually had an adenocarcinoma.[D] This was a common mistake at the time, and the treatment would not have differed.[27]

Death and burial

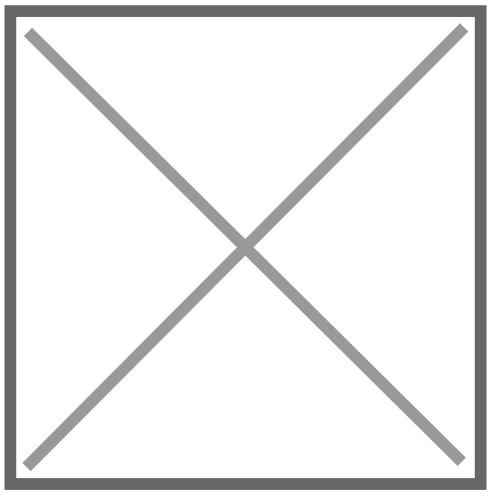
On August 8, 1951, Lacks, who was 31 years old, went to Johns Hopkins for a routine treatment session and asked to be admitted due to continued severe abdominal pain. She received blood transfusions and remained at the hospital until her death on October 4, 1951.[29] A partial autopsy showed that the cancer had metastasized throughout her entire body.[2][30]

Lacks Town Road in Clover, Virginia, near where Lacks grew up and is buried

Lacks was buried in an unmarked grave in the family cemetery, in a section of Clover, Virginia, called Lackstown.

Medical and scientific research

Main article: HeLa



Dividing HeLa cells in culture. The cells can be seen metaphase and telophase, different stages of cell division.

George Otto Gey, the first researcher to study Lacks's cancerous cells, observed that these cells were unusual in that they reproduced at a very high rate and could be kept alive long enough in culture to allow more in-depth examination.[35] Until then, cells cultured for laboratory studies survived for only a few days at most, which was not long enough to perform a variety of different tests on the same sample. Lacks's cells were the first to be observed that could be divided multiple times without dying, which is why they became known as "immortal". After Lacks's death, Gey had Mary Kubicek, his lab assistant, take further HeLa samples while Henrietta's body was at Johns Hopkins' autopsy facility.[36] The roller-tube technique[E] was the method used to culture the cells

obtained from the samples that Kubicek collected.[38] Gey was able to start a cell line from Lacks's sample by isolating one specific cell and repeatedly dividing it, meaning that the same cell could then be used for conducting many experiments.

> The ability to rapidly reproduce HeLa cells in a laboratory setting has led to many important breakthroughs in biomedical research. HeLa cells were in high demand and put into mass production. They were mailed to scientists around the globe for "research into cancer, AIDS, the effects of radiation and toxic substances, gene mapping, and countless other scientific pursuits".[30] HeLa cells were the first human cells successfully cloned, in 1955,[41] and have since been used to test human sensitivity to tape, glue, cosmetics, and many other products.[2] There are almost 11,000 patents involving HeLa cells.[2]

Consent issues and privacy concerns

> Neither Henrietta Lacks nor her family had given her physicians permission to harvest her cells. At that time, permission was neither required nor customarily sought.[44] The cells were used in medical research and for commercial purposes.[30][2] In the 1980s, family medical records were published without family consent. A similar issue was brought up in the Supreme Court of California case of *Moore v. Regents of the University of California* in 1990. The court ruled that a person's discarded tissue and cells are not their property and can be commercialized.[45]

In October 2021, Lacks's estate filed a lawsuit against Thermo Fisher Scientific for profiting from the HeLa cell line without Lacks's consent,[47][48] asking for "the full amount of [Thermo Fisher's] net profits".[49] On July 31, 2023, Thermo Fisher Scientific settled with the Lacks family on undisclosed terms.[50]

In February 2026, the Lacks family gained an out-of-court settlement with a second biotech company, Switzerland-based Novartis. Details of the settlement have not been made public. Lawsuits against several other drug companies are still ongoing.[51]

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[1] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henrietta_Lacks

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