

## **SD Science and Education Alliance Launches “The Henrietta Lacks Project”**

A San Diego science and education alliance has launched “The Henrietta Lacks Project: A Community Exploration of Science, Ethics and Diversity.” This unprecedented regional series of events will examine research ethics and diversity issues through the platform of the bestselling book *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* by Rebecca Skloot.

Spanning the 2011-2012 academic year from September through June, “The Henrietta Lacks Project” will involve six universities and colleges – San Diego State University, the University of San Diego, CSU San Marcos, Point Loma Nazarene University, Grossmont College, and UC San Diego – in leading a public discussion of the riveting story of Lacks, an African-American cancer patient whose cells were used for research without her knowledge. The coalition includes the Reuben H. Fleet Science Center, the San Diego-based Center for Ethics in Science and Technology (Ethics Center), and SDSU’s Initiative for Moral Courage. Educators from the San Diego Unified School District will offer special curricular programs, and area K-12 students will be invited to participate in activities throughout the county.

All participating institutions will stage multiple satellite events. As one example, the Ethics Center will devote nine of its monthly “Exploring Ethics” public forums at the Fleet Center to a special “Henrietta Lacks Series.” A high point of the series, which is coordinated with CONNECT, will be a November 2 lecture at the Fleet by Skloot.

*The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* chronicles the true story of how cervical cancer cells taken from Lacks were used without her permission to produce a human cell line for research purposes. Officially labeled “HeLa” cells, Lacks’ cell line was so resilient and bountiful that it is still being used for medical research 60 years after her death in 1951. HeLa cells have been instrumental in studying cancer, polio, radiation sickness, gene mapping, and a range of other areas.

The book, Skloot’s first, has won widespread acclaim and numerous awards, including the Wellcome Trust Book Prize and the Heartland Prize. It was ranked among the “Top 10 Books of 2010” by *Publisher’s Weekly* and among the “100 Notable Books of the Year” by *The New York Times*.

“We are tremendously excited about this first-of-a-kind series and the opportunities it presents for dynamic public engagement about science,” said Ethics Center Director Michael Kalichman, who also directs the UC San Diego Research Ethics Program. “San Diego is the perfect place to stage such an ambitious series, and the story of Henrietta Lacks is the ideal catalyst for it.”

For further information, visit <http://www.ethicscenter.net/> or <http://www.openlearningcommons.com/>.

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**The Center for Ethics in Science and Technology**  
**presents**  
**“The Henrietta Lacks Series”**

In conjunction with San Diego’s “The Henrietta Lacks Project,” the Ethics Center is devoting nine “Exploring Ethics” forums, from September 2011 to May 2012, to discussions of research ethics and diversity issues related to the bestselling book *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*.

“Exploring Ethics” forums take place in the Reuben H. Fleet Science Center in Balboa Park. Forums scheduled to date are:

Wednesday, September 7, 2011 – 5:30 p.m. to 7:00 p.m.

“HeLa: Immortal Cells and Enduring Questions”

Speaker: Laura Rivard, Adjunct Professor of Biology, University of San Diego

**HeLa cells taken from Henrietta Lacks in the 1950s without her permission are still used in research – and her story still resonates with ethical issues related to informed consent.**

Wednesday, October 5, 2011 – 5:30 p.m. to 7:00 p.m.

“The Politics of Race, Class, Gender and HIV/AIDS in South Africa”

Speaker: Jamie Gates, Professor of Cultural Anthropology and African Studies and Director of the Center for Justice and Reconciliation, Point Loma Nazarene University

**The HIV-AIDS crisis in South Africa, like the Henrietta Lacks story, is a controversial chapter in modern health care that raises ethical questions about science, race, gender and inequality.**

Wednesday, November 2, 2011 – 5:30 p.m. to 7:00 p.m.

Special Appearance by Rebecca Skloot, author of *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*

**Skloot will discuss her award-winning book, why she wrote it, and how its themes of research ethics and diversity have attracted global attention and sparked ongoing public debate.**

Wednesday, December 7, 2011 – 5:30 p.m. to 7:00 p.m.

“What the Public Needs to Know About Clinical Trials”

Speaker: Georgia Sadler, Clinical Professor of Surgery, UC San Diego

**Clinical trials are indispensable to advances in medical treatment, but their value depends on recruiting participants who are diverse in race, ethnicity, and age.**

Wednesday, January 4, 2012 – 5:30 p.m. to 7:00 p.m.

“Science Literacy and Underserved Populations”

Speaker: Tate Hurvitz, Professor of English, Grossmont College

**One lesson from the Henrietta Lacks story is the importance of effective teaching of scientific literacy through both science content and strategies for understanding complex information.**

Wednesday, February 1, 2012 – 5:30 p.m. to 7:00 p.m.

Title to be announced

Speaker: Katherine Kantardjieff, Dean, College of Science and Mathematics, CSU San Marcos

Wednesday, March 7, 2012 – 5:30 p.m. to 7:00 p.m.

Title to be announced

Speaker: Stanley Maloy, Dean, College of Sciences, Associate Director, Center for Microbial Sciences, San Diego State University

Wednesday, April 4, 2012 – 5:30 p.m. to 7:00 p.m.

““Is Henrietta Lacks *Really* Immortal? Religious Perspectives on Life, Death, and Immortality”

Moderator: Chris Frost, Professor of Religion and Associate Dean, Division of Undergraduate Studies, San Diego State University

Panelists:

- Michael Lodahl, Professor of Theology and World Religions, Point Loma Nazarene University
- Khaleel Mohammed, Associate Professor of Religion, San Diego State University
- Karma Lekshe Tsomo, Associate Professor of Theology and Religious Studies, University of San Diego

Wednesday, May 2, 2012 – 5:30 p.m. to 7:00 p.m.

Lacks Series Capstone Event: Title to be announced

Organized by the UCSD Student Society for Medical Ethics; speaker to be announced.