

SD Science and Education Alliance Launches “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, California State University 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 also includes the Reuben H. Fleet Science Center, the San Diego-based Center for Ethics in Science and Technology (Ethics Center), and CONNECT. 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. To provide a community focus for all of these institutions, 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 the Initiative for Moral Courage at SDSU, will be a November 2 lecture by Rebecca 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 that 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
“The Henrietta Lacks Series”

The Center for Ethics in Science and Technology (Ethics Center) engages the public in discussing ethical challenges presented by new developments in science and technology. The hallmark of its programming is the “Exploring Ethics” series of monthly forums at the Reuben H. Fleet Science Center. In conjunction “The Henrietta Lacks Project,” the Ethics Center has scheduled nine “Exploring Ethics” forums to discussions of research ethics and diversity issues related to *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*. Forums 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 without her permission are still used in research; 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 Lacks story, is a controversial health care chapter that raises ethical questions about science, race, gender and inequality.

Wednesday, November 2, 2011 – 6:00 p.m. to 7:30 p.m.

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

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

Moderator: Lindia Willies-Jacobo, Professor of Pediatrics, Assistant Dean for Diversity and Community Partnerships, UCSD School of Medicine

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

Moderator: Sunita Cooke, President, 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.

The Ethics Center is co-sponsored by:

UC San Diego~San Diego State University~University of San Diego~Reuben H. Fleet Science Center

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

“The Conduct of Science in the Information Age”

Speaker: Katherine Kantardjieff, Dean, College of Science and Mathematics, California State University San Marcos

New digital technologies that are transforming the conduct of science create challenges regarding access, ownership, quality, and validation of data. This talk will address technical, social and ethical implications of conducting science in the information age, with a focus on molecular structure data generated by X-ray diffraction.

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

“Health Care Disparities: The Palliative Power of Understanding Science”

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

Moderator: Estralita Martin, Assistant Dean, College of Sciences, San Diego State University

Too often, ethnicity and socioeconomic status affect access to medical services. A lack of scientific knowledge can impede a patient’s ability to understand and influence their healthcare. How can we help a diverse public understand science well enough to make informed health care choices?

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

A panel of distinguished religious scholars will discuss how some major world religions’ views of life, death, and the afterlife intersect with theological and ethical issues that lie at the heart of the Henrietta Lacks story.

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

“Henrietta Lacks and Human Subject Research: A Look at Past, Present, and Future”

Speakers: Michael Cheng, Dong Tran, and Nitin Prabhakar of the UCSD Student Society for Medical Ethics

Moderator: Mary Devereaux, Director, Biomedical Ethics Seminars, UCSD Research Ethics Program, UCSD Health Law Academic Coordinator

Fifty years after the rights of Henrietta Lacks were ignored, federal law and ethical guidelines now govern the use of human subjects in research. How well do such safeguards work in an era of dwindling privacy and widening socioeconomic gaps?