

Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks Argumentative Research Essay

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## Abstract

In this essay it will show the beginnings of medical ethics and how some have originated from the class structure and how the society was structured as well. This essay will also show what medical ethics are, and the major influencers of the certain medical ethics. Next, the essay will tell about the story of henrietta lacks and how her story will change the medical ethics that were already set, change again for the best. Lastly, the essay will state how medical ethics have changed from the earliest of times to now.

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Medical Ethics are often described as a proper and professional way to insure the rights of the patient, doctor and the physician. It is also described as a way to tell the physicians how to properly care for the patients that are getting medical care. Medical Ethics have originated from all different sources around the world, they have been developed and shaped based off how the society is developed and off of religious values. These values of Christianity, Judaism, set the foundations on some of the medical ethics that were imputed. (Royal College, 2014)

There has been a shift over the years with in the medical ethics, the American Association Medical Association (AMA) has medical codes that are set forth and they are made up of three components. The codes of medical ethics, ethical opinions of the council on ethical and judicial affairs, and reports of the council on ethical and judicial affairs. In the fifth century of BCE there was something called the Oath of Hippocrates, which was a brief list of rules that physicians are supposed to follow. The Oath of Hippocrates was modified the medical ethics that were already put into place in 10th or 11th AD to eliminate the reference to pagan deities, and they are used to mark people going into the medical profession. (Royal College, 2014)

In 1803, a man by the name of Thomas Percival who was a physician and a philosopher wrote codes or also known as medical ethics that showed professional duties and ideal behavior that should be followed in a hospital or in any other medical setting. In which we still follow

today whether it be as a doctor, physician, or a volunteer at the hospital. Because it is right to give the patients the right treatment care, treat them fairly, and equally. (Royal College, 2014)

There is such a debate in the area of medical ethics because of what people think is ethical and unethical. One of the major areas as to where people think that researchers are breaking medical ethics is with stem cell research. Stem cell research is research that involves embryos that are five days old and they have 150 chromosomes. They use these embryos to test new and developing drugs that are in the process of being made. The cells are also used to cure and fix the damaged cells of other people, and to understand how diseases work and develop within the body. (Stem Cell Basics, 2015)

There is such a debate with the idea of stem cell usage and research because of how people feel about the embryos. People believe that this type of research is unethical because of embryos come from daughter cells so some people consider the cells to be developing babies, and by them doing this research they are killing a potential baby. Advocators are trying to get this research to stop because as stated before they feel as if researchers are killin babies. But other people support this research because they don't feel like they are not killing a baby and because there has been many medical advances. There will always be a constant debate between whether or not we should use stem cell research, but for now we continue to use it to better the health of everyone. (Stem Cell Basics, 2015)

## Literature: The immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks

In the book “The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks” it shows the perspective of how Henrietta Lacks lived. The story starts off with the Author giving a background on the Lacks family and how Hela Cells would change their lives forever. The book then goes into depth of Henrietta's childhood and how she found and then married her husband David Lacks, in which the two of them had a total of five children. Once she had her fourth child she felt as if there was a knot inside of her and she had spotting of her underwear even though it wasn't her time of the month. Henrietta had found something in her cervix that was hard, and at that moment she knew that there was something wrong with her and there was no point in hiding it from her husband any longer. (Skloot, 2010)

Henrietta had her husband David drive and take her to the hospital, she told the doctors that she thought there was something inside of her that she knew was wrong. The doctors did an exam and quickly found what Henrietta was talking about, they described it to be a hard nickel sized lump that was the color of grape jello. The doctors at Hopkins Hospital did a test to see if she had a case of syphilis, but the test had come back negative. So the doctors did another test to see what the lump was and they found out that the lump was indeed cancer. (Skloot, 2010)

Determined to not let the cancer get the best of her, Henrietta started cancer treatments at Hopkins. Before her cancer treatments the Hopkins Hospital asked her to sign a consent paper that basically gave the doctors permission to do any procedure that may seem necessary. But her

signature was so illegible that someone else had to sign the consent for her instead. During one of the first treatments of Henrietta one of the nurses took samples of Henrietta's cervix, by request of another doctor to create some of the first immortal cells. Without asking Henrietta if she wanted to be a donor or asked if they could take some of her cells in order to create some of the first immortal cells. They just took her cells without asking Henrietta, and violating the medical ethics that were put in place at Hopkins Hospital. (Skloot, 2010)

When they took her cells the family had no idea that Doctors were growing and selling their mother's cells. The Lacks family struggled financially throughout the years, they didn't have the money to receive any medical attention even for the common cold. After years of hiding that they were selling and distributing Henrietta's cells the press finally published an and reached out to the Lacks family. When they found out about Henrietta's cells being distributed they knew no way as to correct their mother's story or to afford a lawyer to get the rights they knew they deserved. (Skloot, 2010)

### Argument

Throughout the book it shows how the doctors at Hopkins constantly violates medical ethics that were put in place. By them taking samples of tissue from her cervix and by them lying to her husband to get him to allow them to to perform an autopsy on Henrietta's body after her death. Once the autopsy was “approved” of the same doctors took samples of her tumors,

tissue. Henrietta's story has changed some of the ways that medical ethics are now today. Some of the examples include to get a consent for anything that the patient needs to know, and making sure that the patient knows all of the information before a procedure. (Skloot, 2010)

Over the years people of the medical profession have struggled to find a way to support and properly help those that are need in the proper health care, but they have come together and created medical ethics that support the patient's rights. It is good to say that from the times of for example of the time of which Henrietta lived in the 1950's there has been a change of medical ethics. The reasons as to why I believe that there has been a shift in medical ethics is because over the years these codes have become more pronounced. (Skloot, 2010)

Over the years medical ethics have evolved into something that had to do more religion based to the proper way to treat people. Some prime examples of this can come from the book "The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks". In the book it talks about how once that this doctor from a gynecologic hospital had told the staff that worked under him to inject everyone that went into Slogan-K. If the patients asked as to why they were getting injected or what they were getting injected with. The workers were instructed to tell them that they were getting tested for a cancer. In which they weren't because there was no such thing at the time nor is there such thing as a "shot" that tests us for caner. (Skloot, 2010)

The ones that refused were fired from the place that they worked because the main doctor said that they didn't follow practical procedures. Once they were fired they exposed the doctor that was endangering the patients lives and they took the doctor to court. Where the doctor was accused of similar to the live Nazi Trials that took place during world war two. The live Nazi trials were trials that took place on people that were in concentration camps, and they directed people while they were alive in order to learn more about the human body. (Skloot, 2010)

Today that method of observing the human body doesn't happen anymore. The way that we examine the human body is through radiation like x-rays, MRI, or a ultrasound. Or if one wants to help further the process in medical discoveries they can donate their body to science, and researchers can do an autopsy and study the body. Some of the current studies that they are working on Alzheimer's, diabetes, multiple sclerosis, and cancer. With people donating their bodies to science these and other current studies can be completed to improve the health of everyone. (science care, 2015)

Another way as to how medicine has evolved over the years, is the different tools that have been developed to perform different procedures that need to be completed to save someone's life. During the time of the civil war they had different tools than of what we have today to use for the standard procedures, so there were more lives lost than saved. The medical team that was there to help those that were wounded had knowledge about germs but they didn't



know how easily they were spread. If a soldier needed surgery they got them drunk so they wouldn't feel the pain as badly, compared to today we use anesthesia. Also during surgery they had to step down the patients so they wouldn't move and they had them bite down on something to muffle the screaming they had in agony. These are just a couple of the many ways of how medical ethics and how medicine has evolved over the years. (american civil war)

Some may argue that there hasn't been any changes medical ethics, but they are wrong. There has been a change because there are more people trusting the medical professionals in what research they are doing. One of the major prime examples is that people are donating their bodies to science. So that means that not only do more people trust medical professionals but they are also trying to help them in any way possible.

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