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STAMPS IN CARDIOLOGY

René Théophile-Hyacinthe Laennec (1781–1826)

This is the only stamp to feature Laennec. It was issued by France on 7 November 1952 as a single stamp and not part of a set featuring other personalities or celebrities. As is frequently the case the rare appearance of notable medical personalities on postage stamps is usually seen from their country of origin or their country of major medical practice.

René Théophile-Hyacinthe Laennec, the inventor of the stethoscope, was born in West Brittany the son of a lawyer and was a pupil of Jean-Nicolas Corvisart at La Charité Hospital, Paris. He introduced the technique of indirect (mediate) auscultation—rather than applying the ear directly to the chest—first by using a cylinder of rolled paper to auscultate the heart of a girl as "her age and sex forbade an examination [by direct auscultation]". Although his first stethoscope was a cyclinder formed of three quires of paper he explored the use of other materials to obtain the best sound transmission. He finally settled on a wooden stethoscope 13 to 18 inches long and 1·5 inches in diameter perforated longitudinally by a bore one quarter inch wide and hollowed out into a funnel shape at one end. He published his text on mediate auscultation *De L'Auscultation Médiate ou Traite du Diagnostic des Maladies des Poumons et du Coeur* with diagrams of his stethoscope in 1819.

He identified for the first time that the cardiac cycle consisted of two sounds and described the auscultatory findings in cardiac and pulmonary disease. He also introduced his method of mediate (or indirect) percussion, striking the chest with his fingers while listening with his stethoscope.

In his classification of pericardial diseases, under the category of "accidental productions", he described the pathological findings in tuberculous pericarditis often in association with widespread pulmonary involvement. In 1826 he introduced the term dissecting aneurysm (in the second edition of *Traite de L'Auscultation Medicale*) although he subscribed to the belief that dissection preceded the formation of all aneurysms.

Throughout much of his life he suffered from pulmonary tuberculosis and died from this disease at the age of 45.

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