

History

A Tribute to the Physician Behind the Stethoscope

Dr. Rene Theophile Laennec

Father of Clinical Auscultation

- Laennec was born in a small village in Brittany, France. At his age of 5 years, he lost his mother due to tuberculosis.
- He was raised by his uncle, who was the Dean of the Medical University. At the age of 14 years, he served as an assistant in caring the sick and wounded patients at the famous hospital **Hotel Dieu**, in Europe and studied medicine at the **University of Paris**.
- After his medical graduation in 1804, while on clinical practice, Dr. Laennec was embarrassed to do **Direct auscultation** (placing ear on the chest of the patient to listen to chest sounds directly) especially to women.
- Suddenly, Laennec recalled his observation of children's playing with long hollow tubes sending signals to each other.
- Thereby, he came up with a new idea of listening to the chest by inventing **Wooden Hollow Tube** which was 3.5 cm in diameter and 25 cm long and was monoaural, transmitting sounds to one ear.
- He named his instrument as **Stethoscope**. In Greek, stethos means chest and skopein means explore.
- In fact, he was the first to describe the bronchial and vesicular breath sounds, egophony, bronchophony, pectoriloquy, rhonchi, crepitations, the two heart sounds S1 & S2 and murmurs.
- Subsequently, he described micro nodular cirrhosis (**Laennec's cirrhosis**) and coined melanoma.
- In the year 1819, he revolutionized the field of medicine by publishing his masterpiece, **On Mediate Auscultation**.
- Unfortunately, Dr. Laennec suffered from cavitary tuberculosis and his life came to an end at the age of 45 years. His nephew used his own stethoscope and diagnosed the tuberculosis.
- His work was acknowledged as a great advancement in the knowledge of chest diseases..



Dr. Gowri Shankar