

Extra Reading Practice – Doctor’s Invention

The Embarrassed Doctor’s Great Invention

I Nothing identifies a doctor quite like a stethoscope. This medical instrument has become the unofficial symbol of medicine. The stethoscope is already over 200 years old, and it is rare to see a doctor or nurse examining patients without one.

II The stethoscope was invented by René Laënnec in 1816. At that time, great advances were being made in the field of medicine, but diagnosing certain conditions, such as heart and lung disease, was often problematic. One common practice of examining a patient was through auscultation, a technique which had been around since Ancient Egypt. This meant putting an ear directly against the patient’s chest or back and listening for certain sounds. It was the most effective diagnostic technique at the time, but because it was difficult to clearly hear the body’s sounds, doctors would often miss critical signs that might indicate illness. The direct body contact could also be a little awkward for both doctor and patient. Many doctors were unhappy to use this particular method because of concerns about patients’ hygiene.

IV One day, a young, overweight woman came to see Laënnec with suspected heart disease. The doctor suspected that he wouldn’t hear anything clearly due to the woman’s size. At that moment, he was reminded of something that he had seen. He took a sheet of paper and rolled it up tightly into a neat tube, placed one end on the woman’s chest and his ear to the other end. Laënnec reported that the woman’s heart could be heard even more clearly than by simply putting his ear to her chest.

V Over the next three years, he experimented with different designs and materials and eventually came up with a narrow tube of wood about 25 cm long, which he called the stethoscope – from the Greek *stethos* meaning chest and *scopos* meaning examine or inspect. Using the new tool, Laënnec managed to learn how to diagnose a variety of different, serious chest diseases such as tuberculosis, pneumonia and emphysema. A few years later, an Irish doctor, Arthur Leared, developed a stethoscope to fit in both ears, and since then, the design has remained largely unchanged.

Laënnec died at the age of 45 from tuberculosis, having been diagnosed by his nephew using the stethoscope Laënnec himself had invented.

1 Choose the correct answer.

- 1 Which statement is NOT true about auscultation?
 - a It is an ancient practice.
 - b It involves physical contact with a patient.
 - c It is used to detect ear illnesses.

- 2 Laënnec's original design
 - a hasn't changed much
 - b fitted into both ears
 - c was made of wood

2 Decide if the following sentences are true (T) or false (F). Find evidence in the text to support your answers.

- 1 Laënnec found he could hear the woman's heart better with the paper tube.
.....

- 2 Laënnec used his stethoscope to diagnose his nephew.
.....

3 Answer the questions.

- 1 What were the concerns of the doctors regarding the use of auscultation?
.....

- 2 What is ironic about the information in the last paragraph?
.....

4 Rewrite the sentences without changing the original meaning.

- 1 It is rare to see a doctor or nurse examining patients without a stethoscope.
Doctors and nurses

- 2 Many doctors were concerned about using this particular method.
This particular method

5 Find words or expressions in the text that mean:

- 1 an area of a particular subject or profession (paragraph II)
- 2 embarrassing or uncomfortable (paragraph II)
- 3 thought or suggested an idea (paragraph IV)
- 4 almost completely (paragraph IV)

Answer Key

1 1 c 2 c

2 1 T – “Laënnec reported that the woman’s heart could be heard even more clearly than by simply putting

his ear to her chest.”

2 F – “... having been diagnosed by his nephew using the stethoscope Laënnec himself had invented.”

3 1 They were afraid to miss critical signs because sounds were difficult to hear, direct body contact could

be awkward and they were worried about the patients’ hygiene.

2 His nephew used the device that he himself had invented to diagnose serious chest diseases.

4 1 are rarely seen examining patients without a stethoscope

2 concerned many doctors

5 1 field

3 came up with

2 awkward

4 largely