

From the Pages of History

Edward Jenner (1749–1823) - The Father of Vaccination

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Edward Jenner was born on May 17, 1749, in Berkeley, Gloucestershire, England. He was the son of the Rev. Stephen Jenner, Vicar of Berkeley. Edward was orphaned at age 5 and went to live with his older brother. Edward developed a strong interest in science and nature in his early school days itself and this continued throughout his life. He apprenticed to a country surgeon and apothecary in Sodbury, near Bristol by the age of 13. On one occasion he heard a dairymaid saying that she will never get smallpox since she has had cowpox, and hence need not worry of ugly pockmark face. Jenner believed that dairymaids were in some way protected from smallpox, he did not know of immunology. Most of the early discoveries were such cause - effect correlation.

In May 1796, Jenner found a young dairymaid, Sarah Nelms, who had fresh cowpox lesions on her arms. On May 14, 1796, he collected the fluid from Nelms' pox lesions and inoculated an 8-year-old boy, James Phipps. Subsequently, the boy developed mild fever and discomfort in the axillae. Nine days after the procedure

he felt cold and had lost his appetite, but on the next day he was much better. In July 1796, Jenner inoculated the boy again, this time with matter from a fresh smallpox lesion. No disease developed, and Jenner concluded that protection was complete – the 'Vaccination' was born (vacca = cow) – Thus in his honour (unwittingly) any procedure of immunization is called Vaccination, till today – a misnomer though.

A statue was planned to be erected for this greatest benefactor of Mankind, in the West Minster Garden. But the house of Lords rejected saying 'a commoner does not have a place amidst Lords'. The statue was thus placed in the mid western side fountain of Kensington Garden, in the heart of London – few visitors however realize the significance of Jenners statue. Don't forget to see this statue if you go to London and recall with nostalgia of your student days and of learning vaccines.

- RM. Pitchappan