Florence Seibert Biography

Florence Seibert

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Biography

Florence B. Seibert was born in 1898 in Easton, Pennsylvania. At the age of three she was stricken with polio and her disability prompted her to pursue an academic career. She won a scholarship to Goucher College in Maryland and after graduation worked as a chemist during World War I. Dr. Seibert won a scholarship to earn her Ph.D. at Yale University. While there she became interested in why many people became ill with fever after receiving intravenous injections made with distilled water. During the 1920s she developed a distillation process that eliminated bacteria in distilled water and made intravenous injections safe.

Seibert's most well-known discovery was the development of a safe and accurate skin test for tuberculosis. Working on a Guggenheim Fellowship at Uppsala University in Sweden, she isolated the active substance in tuberculin--a derivative of purified bacterial protein and then used it to improve the accuracy of the skin test. In 1941, her improved TB skin test became the standard test in the United States and in 1952 it was adapted by the World Health Organization, and is still in use today.

Her other credits include teaching positions at the University of Chicago and University of Pennsylvania, serving with the United States Public Health Service, director of the Cancer Research Laboratory at the Mound Park Hospital in Florida, and induction into the National Women's Hall of Fame in 1990.