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Alternative PLF Assignment 1

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Patient Zero

The podcast discusses the idea of “Patient Zero”. A group of young and curious individuals go through history explaining the listener what is Patient Zero and why is it so important. The seemingly casual conversational tone of the “show” draws the listener, however the scientific facts and introduction of some researchers and historians gives it a definitive credibility.

So what is “Patient Zero”? From medical perspective Patient Zero is a person first diagnosed to have a new, unknown before disease or medical condition. From scientific perspective it is anyone or even anything that is recognized as the “first” to do something. The speakers go through 4 examples of what they think are perfect and diverse.

First they discuss a case of a viral disease that spread rapidly in and around Oyster Bay back in 1906. Here the Patient Zero was a cook by the name of Mary Mallon, also known as Typhoid Mary. The disease under discussion is, of course, Typhoid Fever. Mary was considered the first case of a healthy carrier.

Next a fairly recent case is discussed involving one of the first massive AIDS outbreaks. The central character of the story is Gaëtan Dugas, again, a Patient Zero. He is known for being responsible for intentionally spreading AIDS throughout the US.

Another example of “Patient Zero” is Glenn Burke` a frontrunner for the LA Dodgers. Burke is credited for the first “high five”. Incidentally he also was one of the first openly gay athletes.

All three of the stories are no more than a century old. A question arises after doing some history research: are Mallon, Dugas and Burke really Patient Zeros? Scientists and epidemiologists have been looking through recorded history trying to find older cases of the viruses. Theoretically it is possible to track a virus back to its origins by the means of the most recent common ancestor. Virus research provides information about the mutation and evolution of their DNA. Turns out that viruses undergo regular mutations. Using this fact it is possible to track it as far back as the actual origin of the virus. The speakers discuss the origins of AIDS, tracking it all the way to Africa. It so happens that AIDS was mutated to relatively its current stable structure trough a chimp. This chimp was the “perfect host” for the virus to evolve into the humanities most deadly disease. The chimp was also the original “Patient Zero” and not one simply known by men to be.

The last story is the origins of the Cowboy hat. Going through written evidence it is not certain as to who was the inventor of the hat. After a simple argument the speakers end up on the idea of a nonliving “Patient Zero”. They state that it is more than likely that the hat evolved to be as it is due to the weather and climate present at the time in the west. No one came up with it, it just was supposed to be made.

The listener can reflect on the discussion being already familiar with the term “Patient Zero” and understand the deeper meaning and the overall generalization.