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NEUROLOGICAL STAMP

Emil Adolph von Behring (1854–1917) and Shibasaburo Kitasato (1852–1931)

Although many of his ideas are now obsolete, von Behring was one of the founders of immunology. He was the recipient of the first Nobel Prize in physiology or medicine awarded in 1901 and was elevated to the Prussian nobility in the same year.

After graduating in medicine from Berlin he entered the Army Medical Corps and in 1888 became a lecturer at the Army Medical College. He joined the Robert Koch Institute of Hygiene in 1889 and in 1891 the Institute of Infectious Diseases, when Koch was appointed its chief.

Von Behring experimented initially with iodine trichloride and zinc chloride as potential treatments for diphtheria and tetanus infections. In 1898, working with Koch's Japanese student Shibasaburo Kitasato, Behring showed that injections of serum from an animal with tetanus could confer immunity to the disease in other animals, and also that the same was true for diphtheria. In collaboration with Paul Ehrlich a diphtheria antitoxin for humans was developed and was first used on Christmas Eve in 1891. In the next year a dramatic fall in mortality from diphtheria occurred. The death rate from diphtheria in Berlin children's hospitals dropped from 48% to 13%. In later life he worked to establish immunity against diphtheria in children by giving them a combination of diphtheria toxin and antitoxin. He also performed research on tuberculosis.

Emil von Behring and Shibasaburo Kitasato were honoured philatelically on a stamp issued by Transkei in 1991 (Stanley Gibbons 273, Scott 255).

LF HAAS