

GENETICS

UNNECESSARILY DISRUPTIVE

13.02.2008

“Positively disruptive” – a new [nature genetics editorial](#) – makes a U turn of the opinion voiced only two months earlier – having at that time cautioned users of new consumer [genomics services](#). The current editorial now reads like an advertisement for deCODEme or Navigenics.

giving individuals their own genotype is not so much premature as truly disruptive. The individual gains a personal stake in the ongoing research effort and a huge incentive to find out more. A personal stake in finding out something that was not previously known is the key to getting students into research and may well be a powerful tool to educate and interest members of the public in the details of their own health and functioning.

Boosting personal research, what a nonsense! The main problem in the field of complex disease genetics is a misunderstanding of DNA technology, a misunderstanding of statistics and misunderstanding of bioinformatics. Instead of proper training, the inclusion of extensive quality control and what else may be needed for serious research, the NG editorial now promotes research by personally affected self-appointed researchers! Maybe the NG staff writer could read [BMJ Yankee doodling](#)?

These “personal genomic services” allow you to “unlock the secrets of your own DNA.” They can tell you your risk of developing lots of common and less common diseases, in comparison with the rest of the population. The rub, of course, is what to do with these data. All the sites take pains to point out that they aren’t giving medical advice. And most of them don’t report any single gene disorders that are the daily work of clinical geneticists and genetic counsellors. What are you supposed to do with the knowledge that you have a 30% increased risk of Alzheimer’s disease or a 40% less likelihood of developing atrial fibrillation? Change your behaviour? How?

As long as there is no improvement in quality of life (and/or life expectancy) all these consumer testing kits do not help anybody; they are simply a waste of money. Maybe you want to look also at the [heated blog discussion during the Just Science week 2008](#)

I'm not opposed to genetic testing. What I'm opposed to is the promotion of private for-profit genetic testing for the average person who doesn't understand the ramifications and/or the limitations.

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