



Legal Rights and Human Genetic Material

Edited by Bartha Maria Knoppers, Timothy Caulfield and T. Douglas Kinsella. 180 pp. Emond Montgomery Publications Limited, Toronto. 1996. Price not stated. ISBN 0-920722-86-5

Overall rating: Good
Strengths: Focuses on emerging issues of genetic testing, DNA banking
Weaknesses: Narrow audience
Audience: Geneticists; those interested in ethical, legal or social aspects of genetics

Suppose you give a blood sample for research into a disease that runs in your family, and years later DNA from the sample is used to study cancer. Your DNA is found to have a genetic variant that indicates a high risk for colon cancer. Several questions arise. Did the researcher have the right to use your DNA for the cancer study? Should you be told the new information that may, in fact, save your life? Should you have had the right to decide in advance if your DNA could be used for other studies and whether or not you wished to receive such information?

We are rapidly moving into the era of genetic medicine. The ethical, legal and social issues are significant and not easily resolved. The editors of this small but important new book on the legal aspects of genetics research are 3 of the world's experts in the field. The book derives from studies supported by the Canadian Genome Analysis and Technology (CGAT) Program — a research effort of the 3 federal granting councils, the National Cancer Institute of Canada and Industry Canada.

Topics include DNA banking, consent forms for DNA research, common and civil law status of genetic material and patent law in rela-

tion to human genetic material. The book is short and user-friendly, but quite uneven in its treatment of the subject.

One chapter reports the results of a survey to identify current practices in DNA banking and related consent forms. There were 2 surprises for me — the low proportion of institutions that actually have a policy concerning DNA banking (< 50%), and the lack of uniformity in those policies, despite a 1991 policy statement by the Canadian College of Medical Geneticists.

I found the chapter on common law status of genetic material informative and was forced to consider whether DNA should be classified as property, person or something-in-between. The law is not clear, and the author argues for the *sui generis* approach of treating DNA as neither person nor property but giving it a special status. The chapter on civil law was less informative. It deals mainly with Quebec civil law, thereby limiting the generality of the conclusions for the rest of Canada.

One section reviews laws in several countries in relation to patenting of life forms and human DNA and genes. Life forms such as genetically altered mice are patentable in many countries, but not in Canada. DNA and genes are patentable in most countries, however the breadth of claims is being restricted to commercial applications resulting from genetic information.

This short informative book will interest those in genetics and anyone with an interest in the ethical, legal and social issues arising from the Human Genome Project.

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Healers at Work: Firsthand Accounts of the Difference Alternative Healing Makes

Peter Downie. 224 pp. Illust. Northstone Publishing Inc., Kelowna, BC. 1996. \$29.95. ISBN 1-55145-080-1

Overall rating: Fair
Strengths: Easy-to-read, conversational style
Weaknesses: Lack of discussion of many major alternative healing systems
Audience: Public

When one considers the vast field of alternative medicine it is no surprise that this book is not much more than a nibble. There is some useful information here, but it is disappointing to see no mention of any of the traditional healing systems such as acupuncture, ayurveda (a traditional east Indian system), herbal therapy, homeopathy, traditional Chinese medicine or nutritional therapies.

Instead, this book is essentially a series of biographic chats with 11 remarkable people: 5 are ministers, and the others are a former priest, a music therapist, a writer, a physiotherapist, a business woman and a university chancellor. These people are all of a spiritual bent.

We are promised no gimmicks or get-well-quick schemes. We are told that healing, as distinguished from the cure of a medical condition, is about reaching an emotional, physical or spiritual equanimity with the demands and complexities of modern life in North America. This type of healing battles against what Sir Laurens Van der Post calls the modern crisis of feeling "unknown in the universe."

This is all very well, but it is reminiscent of the way in which the Freudians, in their enthusiasm for the