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The Lady or The Tiger?

As advances in the Human Genome Project open the door to genetic medicine, what are we likely to find behind it? The possibilities are as exciting as they are worrisome. Along with great promise, these technologies bring dangers—including threats to our privacy, to our respect for the dignity of individuals, and to life itself.

Despite these justified concerns, the medical world cannot afford to slam the door on a realm that holds such promise for curing what ails us. New applications emerge almost daily, with predictions ranging from complete closure of all hospital cancer wards to a genetic therapy alternative for treatment of virtually all diseases.

“By the year 2004, the typical primary care physician will no more be able to practice medicine without thinking genetically than he or she can practice today without knowing about infectious diseases,” says Alan E. Guttmacher, a major player in the Human Genome Project who is the subject of an interview in this issue’s special section.

But even as genetic medicine moves into the mainstream, physicians and other healthcare providers will have to grapple with the attendant ethical issues. Guttmacher insists debate on these issues should not be restricted to scientists, but the subject of a larger societal dialogue.

Thomas A. Shannon, a professor of religious and social ethics, gives an overview of those issues, while Vincent Branick and M. Therese Lysaught zero in on one particularly thorny area: stem cell research. As *Health Progress* was going to press, the National Bioethics Advisory Commission urged an end to the ban on federal funding for research on stem cells derived from human embryos. In their timely dissection of this issue, Branick and Lysaught examine the Catholic tradition’s concept of complicity and cooperation with evil to determine whether such procedures would be in keeping with a respect for human life.

MISSION AND BUSINESS

Several articles in this issue try to resolve the tensions between mission and business. *Health Progress* launches a series of articles on mission-based investing—a form of socially responsible investing that incorporates mission. Check out Brian Casey’s article on page 26 and become part of a dialogue on MBI on CHA’s Web site (www.chausa.org). And Rev. Gerald A. Arbuckle, SM, introduces the psychological concept of splitting as a way to achieve a creative balance.