

19 February, 2009

The Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs
The Senate
PO Box 6100
Parliament House, Canberra, ACT 2600



Gene Patents


This submission is made by my husband and myself as individual constituents and relates to the concerns we have about the commercialization and monopolisation of human genes patents. The motivation in writing this submission results from a diagnosis of ovarian cancer for me in June 2006, and the concerns we have for other family members being able to access genetic testing to alert them more precisely to potential familial cancer predispositions.

While undertaking counseling for genetic testing myself in Perth in 2008, I was informed that currently there are some international actions which may result in the commercialization of genetic testing in Australia. We would consider this a retrograde step, as we understand this would inhibit opportunities for individuals in accessing information related to their genetic coding in the future because of the costs likely to be incurred. Most particularly, our concerns for younger family members are felt as they are often in positions of paying off housing loans and attending to costs related to their own children, and put costs related to themselves on the 'back burner'. Cancer awareness (and indeed awareness of other serious health risks) should not be deferred; it should be confronted. With genetic testing, tracing and identifying offending genes enables people to be alert to early symptoms, and hopefully achieve more favourable longer term outcomes. Such outcomes are also more likely to reduce long term costs for Australian medical health services.

While the above comments derive from my personal situation, more broadly the philosophical concept of patents applying to an individual's genetic coding is a matter of concern. On a micro scale, surely there is nothing more individually owned than a person's genetic coding; granting patents over human genes makes all of us able to access such personal information only if we are financially able. As far as possible, personal knowledge and health should not have a price, and certainly should not depend on other people's profits. The granting of these patents returns companies to thoughts not of the 'triple bottom line' but of the 'single bottom line'. It will make Australia a less caring society.

Yours sincerely,

R. J. Haskell.
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