

The great gene-patent debate continues: Does it help or hinder research?

An ongoing legal battle over gene patents has led many scientists to ask whether such claims help or hinder research. That question will be debated once more on 20 July when Myriad Genetics, a diagnostic company in Salt Lake City, Utah, returns to the US courts to argue that its patents on the *BRCA1* and *BRCA2* gene variants — linked to inherited breast and ovarian cancer — are valid. Currently, the patents give Myriad exclusive rights to conduct diagnostic tests on the genes. The judges are expected to issue an opinion by late summer. The case is important because thousands of genes have been patented in the United States, and no one is sure what will happen if the judges rule Myriad's patents invalid. *Nature* examines what the Myriad case means to biotechnology and genetic medicine.

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