Has the Age of Genomics been oversold?

We live in an age of hype. But the overselling of the Age of Genomics — the hype about the hope, the silence about the disappointments — gobbles up funding that we might spend better elsewhere, warps the expectations of patients and the incentives of scientists, and has implications even for people who pay genetics scant attention.

To be sure, medical genetics has chalked up some sweet victories. Our growing ability to spot rare mutations, for instance, is helping doctors diagnose and sometimes treat nasty rare diseases. But when it comes to how genes shape the traits and diseases that matter most to us — from intelligence and temperament to cancer and depression — genetic research overpromises and underdelivers on actionable knowledge.

The genomic age's signature finding is not any great discovery. It is the yawning gap between the genetic contributions that geneticists assume exist and the genetic contributions they can spot. It is as if they cracked a safe they *knew* was packed with cash and found almost nothing.

None of this is to say we should pull the plug on Big Genomics. Some suggest — and I agree — that we'd do well to take some of the billions spent chasing genes for conditions like Type II diabetes, heart disease, or stroke and spend it instead on finding ways to change risk-elevating behaviors like smoking, overeating, overdrinking, and avoiding exercise.

It would be responsible, however, for researchers to temper their hype — though this seems unlikely, because hype pays.

The GLP aggregated and excerpted this blog/article to reflect the diversity of news, opinion and analysis. Read full, original post: Weighing The Promises Of Big Genomics