

Is genetic testing devolving into ‘hucksterism’?

[Editor's note: David Shaymitz is the chief medical officer of DNAnexus, a genetic data management company.]

The ready availability of genetic testing has created a contradictory set of challenges...I've been struck by...the use of specious genetic tests to motivate behavior change, such as the use of “genetically informed” diets or “genetically informed” exercise programs...In a very real sense, this is genetics as placebo.

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This phenomenon seems like an expression of what medical anthropologist [Arthur Kleinman](#) called the [Explanatory Model](#)...[For instance, after] genetic testing [suggested](#) he was at increased risk for diabetes, NIH director Francis Collins immediately altered his diet and exercise regimen—presumably because he strongly connected with the idea of genetic risk.

The thing is, from a medical perspective, [Collins] shouldn't have needed genetic testing to motivate lifestyle changes. Yet apparently, it took genetic testing because that deeply resonated with his explanatory model of illness.

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[But] what's so wrong about using genetic testing to motivate behavior change in those who are susceptible?

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The problem is that even if there are short-term successes, they may come at the unacceptable cost of eroding trust in the underlying science, a consequence that might ultimately undermine what genetics could one day deliver.

My fear is that validated genetics gets overwhelmed by hucksterism, and patients who might benefit from genetics will get turned off, and reject critically important advice.

The GLP aggregated and excerpted this blog/article to reflect the diversity of news, opinion, and analysis. Read full, original post: [Precision Credulity: How Specious Genetic Tests Might Motivate Real Behavior Change](#)