Viewpoint: There’s no reason to panic over human germline editing

[Editor’s note: Hank Greely is a professor of law and genetics at Stanford University.]

Controversy has raged about editing human genes, particularly the DNA of embryos that could pass the changes down to their descendants. This technology, human germline editing, seems highly unlikely to be broadly available for at least the next few decades; if and when it is, it may well be unimportant.

…

For the next few decades, human germline editing offers almost no substantial benefits, for health or for enhancement. Prospective parents already have a tried and true alternative to avoid having children with genetic diseases: preimplantation genetic diagnosis (PGD). In PGD, clinicians remove cells from three- to five-day-old embryos. Those cells are then tested to see which embryos would inherit the disease and which would not.

…

People are also concerned about germline editing for genetic enhancement. But this is also unlikely anytime soon. We know basically nothing about genetic variations that enhance people beyond normal. For example, we know hundreds of genes that, when damaged, affect intelligence – but these all cause very low intelligence. We know of no variations that non-trivially increase it.

…

If genetic enhancement ever becomes possible in a non-trivial way, it would raise important questions, but questions about enhancement generally and not fundamentally about genetics.

The GLP aggregated and excerpted this blog/article to reflect the diversity of news, opinion, and analysis. Read full, original post: Why the Panic Over “Designer Babies” Is the Wrong Worry