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Gene-law makers ‘confused’

By Tina Kroniniris
Legislators in this country need to consider social factors before passing laws on mass genetic screening – widespread testing for genetic disorders – said Phillip Reilly, J.D., Postdoctoral Fellow in Medical Genetics at the Texas Medical Center.

Legislators, he pointed out, have generally been more interested in case findings than in curing carriers of genetic diseases. He attributed the problem partly to the fact that the politicians and lawyers involved in legislation on mass genetic screening have often been misinformed about the nature of genetic disorders. Reilly, whose book manuscript on Genetics, Law, and Social Technology is now being reviewed by Harvard University Press, spoke primarily about legislation on mandatory screening of individuals for phenylketonuria (PKU) and sickle cell anemia, PKU, a chromosomal disorder which leads to mental retardation in children is rare in the United States. Yet, Reilly pointed out, this disease has received more attention than some genetic disorders which occur much more often.

In a historical account of laws passed in this country on mass genetic screening, Reilly observed that these laws were not the result of relevant considerations, but rather of confusion about the diseases involved, and lack of direction. In the case of sickle cell anemia, he said, the lawmakers have failed badly to communicate the importance of the disease, and have even confused it with another disorder.

Between 1962 and 1968, (Please turn to page 6)

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1. Write an epic poem no shorter than 247 pages long using the following 5 words only: cactus, Gold, lime, Sunrise, Agamemnon.
2. Read Milton’s Paradise Lost. Explain why you liked it, then better when he was on TV.
3. Translate a map of Mexico into English, leaving out all the consonants.
4. Disregard all of the above, make a pitcher of Cuervo Margaritas, and invite all your friends over.

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