

Trans-NIH Communications Group on Genetics and Common Disease

Charge:

The recent outpouring of data from genome-wide association studies should rapidly advance scientific understanding of the genetics of common disease and also enable new avenues of basic and applied research. These data have already created unparalleled opportunities for companies such as 23andMe, deCODE, and Navigenics to market personalized genetic information to consumers directly, via the web. However, both the public and health professionals are currently ill prepared to deal with the health applications of this increasing abundance of information or to deal with its commercial use, and there is a danger of overstating the immediate benefits for clinical medicine.

The Trans-NIH Communications Group on Genetics and Common Disease is charged with rapidly developing and implementing a cohesive communications plan to inform and educate both the public and health professionals about the genetics of common disease and traits. Such a plan should include guidance regarding how to understand the implications of data generated by genome-wide association studies, how to interpret such data, and how to use it in personalized health care. Importantly, the plan should also address the limitations of this sort of data and how to be an informed consumer and user of genetic information. Methods to accomplish these objectives might include press releases, media conferences, construction of a web site, working with voluntary health organizations, and other strategies that the Group determines.