



American  
Clinical Laboratory  
Association

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Letters to the Editor  
The Boston Globe  
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To the Editor:

There is absolutely no doubt about the human genome's value as a health tool, either today or for tomorrow ["Some Doubt Genome's Value as Health Tool," April 21, 2008]. The fact is, the knowledge we've gained from mapping the genome is at work right now, as we speak, in making diagnosis and treatment more effective for patients around the globe.

Genomics-based scientific advances over the past decade have increased our ability to diagnose disease earlier and tailor treatment to the exact genetic profile of the individual patient. These are tests with sound evidence and effective government oversight.

For example, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration has cleared a new genetic test that will help physicians assess whether a patient may be especially sensitive to the blood-thinning drug warfarin (commonly known as Coumadin), which is used to prevent potentially fatal clots in blood vessels. Warfarin is the second most common drug, after insulin, implicated in emergency room visits for adverse drug events.

Also, tests that read the DNA structure of the most common form of leukemia in children have helped boost the 10-year survival rate from four percent in the 1960's to more than 80 percent today. Similarly, diagnostic HIV tests that check the genetic code of the individual's virus and guide physicians in selecting specific treatments have helped transform HIV from an almost certain death-sentence to a manageable chronic disease.

To sure, the human genome presents a universe of medical possibilities and information. Much of that still remains unclear. But please don't leave the impression that the value of genomics-based medicine is in question. We urge you to recognize that our ability to map the human genome is already powering dramatic improvements in how we diagnose, treat, and even think about disease.

Sincerely,

Alan Mertz