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## Investigative Reporting of Genetic Testing in the Workplace

In February 1980, a series of front-page articles appeared in the *New York Times* on the subject of genetic testing in the workplace (1-4). The *Times* series did an excellent job of identifying selected technological and social issues possibly associated with a vastly underreported subject. On the basis of the information presented in the *Times* series, it is obvious that this subject requires further, extensive public policy analysis.

The *Times* series was a major impetus to subsequent congressional hearings on this subject (5-7). To the great surprise of the congressional subcommittee investigating occupational genetic testing, it was learned through a survey of major American companies that many companies have used either biochemical genetic testing or cytogenetic testing in the past, some are using these tests presently, and many companies expressed an interest in using such testing in the future. The consensus at the congressional hearings was that the technology associated with genetic testing was in the embryonic stage. Major scientific and feasibility issues must further be resolved before possible practical applications of genetic testing for occupational screening or monitoring may be pursued. A large number of unresolved ethical and legal issues were also raised at the hearings.

Legislation may come out of the congressional hearings. Congressman Albert Gore, Jr., who chaired the investigating subcommittee, has reportedly asked the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health to begin work on guidelines pertaining to what constitutes a valid genetic screening test (8). The subcommittee hearings have further led him to call for the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission to design guidelines affecting workers possibly at risk in the workplace environment (9). Another proposed action was for Congress to amend existing occupational safety and health laws to protect workers from possible discrimination in employment and job placement (9).

Before the publishing of the *Times* series, relatively little attention was directed in the scientific literature towards identification and analysis of the many technologic and public policy issues possibly associated with occupational genetic testing. Since the publishing of the *Times* series, however, a growing body of editorials, commentaries, and articles have appeared in the literature, addressing selected issues possibly raised by this subject. Legislation pertaining to occupational genetic testing has similarly been enacted in several States since the publishing of this series of articles.

Much remains to be learned about occupational genetic testing. On the basis of the prompt, strong reaction of the scientific and public health community to the publishing of the *Times* series, it appears that continued investigative reporting in close

alliance with ongoing scientific investigation is an important factor associated with efficacious public policy development in the area of genetic testing in the workplace.

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## Letters to the Editor Encouraged

*Readers are invited to join in the dialog in our "Letters to the Editor" section. Responsible comments on the journal's contents and on current concerns in public health are welcome. We ask that future comments be limited to 500 words and 10 references—conciseness is appreciated.*