

In the previous editorial I made mention of the two important conferences on ethical aspects of genetic technologies that had been planned to be held in Iran (November 2010 and February 2011). In the November conference which was held by the Avicenna Research Institute, the ethical and social aspects of using genetic technologies were presented to the academic and non-academic audiences. This conference was widely covered by the national media and the subject of genetics with its interdisciplinary nature initiated discussion between experts in both fields of natural and social sciences. Since some of our colleagues were not able to attend the conference, I thought it would be appropriate to provide a brief summary of the theme of presentations in the conference. The two day conference was organized in four panels and the topics presented in each panel were discussed from ethical, legal and social points of view. The four panels were as follows:

- 1) Genetics and the Emergence of Life
- 2) Genetics in Diagnosis and Treatment of Diseases
- 3) Plant and Animal Genetics
- 4) New Findings on the Science of Genetics

In the first panel 10 lectures were presented on topics of eugenics, cloning, genetic diagnostics and abortion. In the second panel 7 lectures were presented on topics of stem cells, Pre-implantation Genetic Diagnosis (PGD), pharmacogenomics and gene therapy. In the third panel on the second day, 8 lectures were presented on topics of genetically modified organisms (GMO), transgenic plants, bio-safety issues and its implementations at the national level, agricultural genetic engineering, Intellectual Property, issues of patent and bio-safety and the rights of consumers with regards to transgenic products. In the fourth panel on the second day, 9 lectures were presented on topics of mental health and human genome, genetic enhancements, completion of human genome and social implications, genetic predisposition to crime and legal responsibility, DNA tests and proof of identity. The topics listed above clearly demonstrate that genetic engineering has had a profound impact on human life in societies worldwide at multilevel. Therefore, it is important for leaders of societies in the modern world to pay attention to the advances in genetic technologies and prepare themselves and institutions under their control to face the challenges which these new technologies induce in the areas of ethics, law and social policies.

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