

Concerns about cut price genetic testing

The Royal College of Pathologists of Australasia (RCPA), Australia's peak body for medical testing has expressed concern about a recent initiative from a health insurance company in Australia, to offer half price genetic testing to its customers.

Whilst the RCPA acknowledges that genetic testing for risk of disease has an established and useful role in some relatively uncommon conditions such as familial cancer and muscular dystrophy, genetic testing for the risk of common disorders such as diabetes, heart attacks and prostate cancer has not been shown to be useful at present.

Dr Graeme Suthers, Chair of the RCPA Genetic Advisory Committee says genetic testing should not be used as a comprehensive indicator of disease.

"The results of tests for predicting risks of common disorders are frequently inconsistent between different companies and often do not reliably predict whether a person will develop a disease," says Dr Suthers.

"Strategies for reducing the risk of common diseases such as having a healthy diet and exercising regularly apply to everyone, not just those who have certain genetic variants."

Dr Suthers advises individuals and companies to gain medical advice prior to obtaining any medical testing. In particular, new genetic tests require careful expert interpretation before they are used to make medical decisions. .

"The important message is to seek advice from appropriately qualified health professionals before spending your money."

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