



European Health Forum Gastein: Experts and Citizens Expect Clear Framework for the Use of Genome-Based Knowledge in Public Health Care

- **Lack of health policy frameworks trouble researchers, doctors and patients**
- **Possibilities for individualised prevention will increase**
- **Genome-based knowledge can contribute to population's health in the future**

“Policymakers and health care systems have to do their homework on the national and European stages now,” according to Dr. Helmut Brand, head of the Public Health Genomics European Network (PHGEN). For this reason, the change in course towards integrating genome-based knowledge into health care systems will only take place very slowly – if at all, says the head of the EU-backed network of experts, which is responsible for the genomics forum at the European Health Forum Gastein (EHFG) from October 3-6. This year genomics will be one of the main focal points of the leading health policy event in the EU. Renowned European and North American experts will discuss the terms and possibilities for the increased use of genome-based knowledge in public health in the future.

In the sphere of public health, in which genomics can make indispensable contributions to the understanding of disease and to better and more effective prevention, the opportunities currently enabling rapid advance in this area of knowledge are largely unavailed. “In most European countries we are not far enough to be able to discuss whether the legal framework is too liberal or too restrictive,” says EHFG President Prof. Günther Leiner. The necessary findings have to be gathered and the framework for optimised prevention and therapy created now. After all, widespread diseases such as diabetes and cancer are all diseases in which genetic disposition is of major significance.

Meanwhile, the first concrete examples have emerged concerning how genomic findings can provide practical benefits for the improvement of a population's health. One example is that a certain receptor gene is responsible for a significantly heightened risk of causing diseases of the coronary arteries. On the basis of this knowledge, corresponding preventive measures can also be taken for persons who have a genetic risk. In the fight against infectious diseases genomics can provide valuable assistance as well. After all, there are a multitude of genetic conditions which determine whether a person can get a particular disease, whether he or she can transmit the disease and whether his or her body will respond in the desired manner to vaccinations or medications. “If we implement genome-based knowledge in a responsible way, public health can become far more effective and efficient,” Mr. Brand is convinced.

The main issues which will be discussed in the genomics forum at the EHFG are:

- What opportunities does genome-based knowledge offer public health?
- What risks result for the individual and society from the broader use of genetic testing and other genetic diagnostics?
- How can genomic knowledge be integrated into health care as fast as possible?

- How can the fears of patients and citizens be addressed?
- What options are open to the EU for finding a common basis for future regulations?

The European Health Forum taking place from October 3-6 is the leading conference on health politics in the EU with 600 high-profile experts from the sphere of politics, health administration, industry, science and NGOs.

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