



EXCLUSIVE REPORTS

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Genelex diversifying its lineup of genetic tests

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Staff Writer

Seattle-based Genelex Corp. is trying to expand its genetic testing business with new products that examine patients' ancestry and nutritional requirements.

Genelex gets 70 percent of its revenue from paternity testing, and another 20 percent of the company's revenue comes from DNA crime testing. Now, the company wants to offer additional kinds of tests so it can compete in a crowded field.

"Paternity testing has become a commodity," Genelex CEO Howard Coleman said.

But Genelex will have to overcome some skepticism within the scientific community. Some researchers want more evidence that the company's nutritional tests are effective.

"It's a powerful hypothesis and may pan out, but we need more clinical results," said Dr. Wylie Burke, University of Washington professor and chair of the Department of Medical History and Ethics.

Less controversial is the ancestry testing, which targets Americans' growing interest in genealogy -- now one of the most popular Internet searches. The \$300 to \$400 genetic tests trace females back to one of 33 clans and males to one of 20. Anthropologists have already been using the technology.

"Among hard-core genealogists, the acceptance for ancestry testing was already there," Coleman said.

Nutritional testing is being greeted with some skepticism, however. Coleman is aware of the doubts.

"There are those in the medical community that see this as the wave of the future, and those that view it as quackery," Coleman said.

Dr. Joe Pizzorno, founder of Kenmore-based natural health school Bastyr University, has used genetic testing with an osteoporosis patient to prescribe nutritional supplement changes.

"The ability to personalize nutritional guidelines is wonderful," Pizzorno said. "I think it's going to revolutionize how we practice medicine."

Pizzorno acknowledged, though, that the larger medical community is looking for more data and has taken a "wait and see" attitude toward nutritional genetic testing. Dr. Burke of the UW said that a conclusive study would require a large number of individuals following a strict diet. Such a study is logistically difficult, Burke said.

"Until we have that kind of data, to a consumer, it's not worth the money," Burke said of nutritional genetic

tests. Genelex charges \$395 for a standard nutritional profile.

More valuable to consumers are Genelex's tests for adverse drug reactions, Burke said. The genetic tests, which have been on the market since 2000, indicate how a patient will metabolize a drug. While Burke believes that more data is needed in this area as well, she suggests that the hope of avoiding dangerous reactions could warrant the tests.

Dr. David Veenstra, assistant professor at the UW School of Pharmacy, said that for drug reaction tests to become more widespread, they need to be readily accessible to patients and relatively inexpensive. The wait period for patients receiving test results should be cut from a week or more to one day, Veenstra said.

"The science and technology haven't gotten to the point where all people should take the tests, but give it 10 years," Veenstra said.

While doctors are hopeful that genetic testing for adverse-drug reaction has potential, Genelex's sales for the product have been modest. Last year, the company sold 300 to 400 informational testing kits, which includes both drug reaction tests and the earlier version of nutritional tests. Coleman said that sales are limited because insurance companies won't reimburse. A drug reaction test runs around \$500.

"The question always is, who's going to pay for it," Coleman said.

Though the paternity testing market is competitive, it remains Genelex's most profitable area. Coleman said that the company is profitable overall but would not disclose revenues.

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