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Messages in our Genes
from *Helsinki Hotline*

Dr Leena Peltonen-Palotie explained how genetics will form the core of future medicine for the physicians and health care systems of tomorrow.

By 2003 the Human Genome Project aims to read the complete message written in our genome - 80,000 gene words made up of 3 billion letters.

To survive and thrive, the human species has adapted at genetic level in response to changing environment and lifestyles. "Spelling errors" within gene words, some resulting in genetic diseases, and other predisposing people to illness during our life time (perhaps triggered by external factors such as life style or environment). Geneticists are identifying gene defects, and genetic predispositions, which will enable the development of treatments, intervention and prevention strategies.

Leaders of our scientific and social communities have articulated the fears that new problems could spring from our new capabilities. Dr Peltonen told us "If used wisely, the knowledge gained from genetics will increase quality of life of individuals and whole societies."