

# GENETIC TESTING: INSURANCE AND THE NHS

**Genetic testing can help identify an individual's predisposition to certain medical conditions. Making use of such data helps provide more certainty as to future health risks faced by individuals and the population as a whole, but not without introducing ethical concerns. This article considers some implications of genetic testing on the insurance industry and the NHS.**

Advances in medical and data technology are changing our lives for the better. Technology can provide health and lifestyle information at the tap of an app. Smartphones offer diagnoses, assess sleep patterns and help us reach our fitness targets. And along with these, there's also been a rise in genetic testing.

## Genetic testing and health insurance

What does this mean for insurance arrangements? Insurers and their actuaries know that the more accurate information they have, the more accurately they can price risks such as the likelihood of becoming ill or dying.

Any imbalance in knowledge raises the issue of what individuals should be required to disclose when buying insurance. The issues are particularly complex for predictive genetic tests, which help to identify the future risk of disease in individuals who are currently without symptoms. Here, there is a need to balance the ability of a currently healthy individual to access insurance with the question of whether knowledge gained through the greater availability of predictive testing should affect the current insurance market model.

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At present, the government and the Association of British Insurers (ABI) agree people should not be put off from accessing the benefits of predictive genetic testing due to worries about insurance pricing implications. This is reflected in two core principles of their new [Code on Genetic Testing and Insurance](#); namely that an insurer will not require or pressure an applicant to undertake any form of genetic test in order to obtain insurance, and that the results of a predictive genetic test already taken may

only be considered under very limited circumstances set out within the code.

## Genetic testing and the NHS

Unlike traditional insurance arrangements, the NHS was created out of the ideal that good healthcare should be available to all, regardless of wealth. As a result, the values underlying the NHS are particularly well suited to capturing the benefits of genetic advances. Increasing genetic testing within the NHS can improve health outcomes and allow public funding to be more effectively targeted toward key risks.

As set out in the [2003 White Paper on Genetics](#), the NHS model prevents healthcare discrimination on the basis of genetic information. Everyone, regardless of their risk, is 'insured' by the NHS, and any future risks uncovered by predictive genetic testing will not affect how much that individual will pay. Therefore, as testing becomes more widely available, people will not have to fear losing their healthcare cover.

## What next?

When considering risks stemming from genetic testing, the complex interactions between insurance and public health arrangements should not be overlooked. And as technology advancements push the boundaries of what can be achieved even further, these issues will become increasingly relevant. At GAD we regularly provide analysis and commentary around the risk and uncertainty of these kinds of problems. Clients can ask 'what if?' and consider financial and other implications in a range of future options.

To find out more, read [the Government Actuary's blog](#) where Martin Clarke shares his views on genetic testing and insurance or contact [ian.rogers@gad.gov.uk](mailto:ian.rogers@gad.gov.uk).



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