

Genetic screening can be health aid

Two University of Michigan professors are among those supporting the practice of prenatal genetic screening on a nationwide scale.

Such screening—a controversial subject in recent years—could reveal a person's predisposition to certain diseases and any features in his or her

genetic constitution that may be linked to disease. Robert Burt, professor of law and law in psychiatry at U-M, and Irwin M. Rosenthal, chairman of the department of health behavior and health education at the U-M School of Public Health, were members of the National Research Council's "Committee for the Study of Inborn Errors of Metabolism," which issued a report endorsing the concept of genetic screening.

GENETIC SCREENING of the newborn sometimes allows doctors to prevent damaging effects from genetic abnormalities. For adults, screening has been used to acquaint prospective parents with possible health hazards which could be inherited by their children.

In general, the report stressed that genetic screening could be an "appropriate form of medical care," provided that certain conditions are met, such as: substantial public acceptance of the practice, scientific and financial feasibility, public education counseling and follow-up programs, and existing measures to evaluate effectiveness of the program.

Included in the report was a survey by Prof. Rosenthal examining the attitudes of certified pediatricians, obstetricians and family practitioners toward genetic screening. Based on the findings, Rosenthal concluded that, although the medical profession may not be fully ready to accept large-scale genetic screening at the present time, "such readiness could be increased if the physicians had greater knowledge of genetics, deeper appreciation of the impact of untreated genetic disease on affected families, and more personal experience with genetic disease."

Of the three groups of physicians surveyed, Rosenthal found pediatricians had the greatest number (517) not favoring genetic screening. It was extremely important, followed by obstetricians with 46.6 per cent and family practitioners with 44.5 per cent.

Among its recommendations, the National Research Council committee urged that "participation in genetic

screening programs should not be made mandatory by law, but should be left to the discretion of the person tested, or, if a minor, of the parents or legal guardians."

RECENT CONTROVERSY over the use of genetic screening has focused on claims that as a result of such practice, some individuals may be singled out and become objects of social discrimination. There have also been claims that genetic knowledge could pave the way for "selective breeding" and reproductive manipulation.

However, the report pointed out, "there is a strong countervailing in-

ertia in the conservatism of medical practitioners and many others of society who tend to be wary of designs for human 'improvement.'"

"These aims can never be realized but given currency in the public mind, such ideas could lead to a constricted view of normality and a loss of respect for genetic and phenotypic diversity. Further, such aims could tend to impose a sense of restricted choice on the public, when in fact the purpose of screening and the use of all genetic knowledge should be to increase options and make choices informed and free of the constraints of ignorance."



Home solar heating can be expensive

Recent news out of Washington indicates that breakthroughs in the solar energy field during the next five years could produce solar heating and cooling systems for homes that will pay for themselves in seven years or less through savings over conventional systems.

As such systems become viable, they may have a stronger impact on the existing home market than in the new home field, according to the United Northwestern Realty Association (UNRA).

"Such equipment is expected to cost about \$4,500 for a 2,000 square foot home," said Michael D. Samrock of

UNRA. "With the steady rise in building costs, many new home buyers may not be able to include these systems in their original purchase."

"However, owners of existing homes with substantial equity in their property, who are seeking to advance its value, may be in far better position to take advantage of the new system."

"IF CLAIMS for the cost saving effectiveness of such systems prove true, an existing home owner might be advised to seek a home improvement loan or take out a second mortgage."

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