

The Goals of Medicine: - and Role of Medical Genetics

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In the past few decades, Medical Genetics had been established as a specialty in Medicine, with its own field of knowledge and skills; scope of service, training and accreditation; and social, ethical and legal frameworks of practice. Developments in both clinical and laboratory arenas had progressed at tremendous pace, and knowledge gained through research efforts had greatly enriched the diagnosis and management of patients and families. Advances in genetics were quickly embraced, often without being thoroughly questioned for their compliance with the primary goals of medicine, nor examined for their social implications. This paper starts with a discussion on the current understanding of the goals of medicine, which includes prevention of disease and promotion of health, relief of pain and suffering, caring and curing of those with malady, and the avoidance of premature death and pursuance of peaceful death. While some of these goals are in common with those of public health, there are major differences. In the present context of relentless advances in genetics, and the growing public awareness of their significance, how medical genetics fit into the general framework of medicine and public health needs to be closely examined. This can be illustrated by the types of applications already implemented in clinical practice, and the projections of future utilization of recent advances. Some controversial issues are raised for further discussion.