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Abstract for Dr Sandy Thomas, Nuffield Council on Bioethics

Research tools in Genetics

The application of the patent system in the broad field of genetics is widely accepted as a justifiable means of striking a reasonable balance between the rights of inventors and the public interest. However patents which claim rights over DNA sequences and other biological molecules raise a number of ethical concerns. These include the idea that such molecules have a special status, that they do not meet the legal criteria for patenting and that there may be possible deleterious consequences for healthcare.

Research tools in genetics, often based on biological molecules such as DNA, are frequently protected by patents. What is being patented is a means of developing a product rather than a product itself. This talk will consider the use of DNA sequences as research tools by reference to specific examples and question whether they are necessary to promote the public interest.