

18

Bio-ownership: who owns the stuff of life?



Box 18.2 Activity: Small group discussion

In small groups participants should be asked to discuss the pros and cons of requiring that consent forms mention specific uses for which tissue may be retained.

Having done so they should report back to the group, after which the discussion can be opened to the group as a whole.



Box 18.3 Activity: Role play

Participants should be asked, in fours, to role play an interaction between a doctor asking for consent to take a sample, a patient aware of the possibility of money's being made from such samples, the partner of that patient and a hospital administrator.

Participants should have 20 minutes to prepare their role play.



Box 18.4 Activity: Brainstorm

The group should be asked to brainstorm their views on what should happen in the case of a person whose cells are potentially as valuable as those of Henrietta Lacks, but who refuses to consent to their being used for any purpose other than his own well-being.



Box 18.7 Activity: Creative writing

Participants should be asked to write a short (1,000-word) essay describing a day in the life of a pathologist who is required to adopt the 'attitude of the funeral parlour' to the dissection of human bodies.

The best contribution might be read out to stimulate a discussion in which people should be asked to comment on the extent to which the 'attitude of the funeral parlour' *is* appropriate in the laboratory (for example, is it acceptable for medical students to play 'catch' with human organs?).



Box 18.9 Activity: Debate

This house believes that the 1993 Biodiversity Convention is destroying rather than protecting the people of the forest and their knowledge.

Participants should be given time to prepare, then organised into teams 'for' and 'against' the motion. Some participants might find themselves arguing against their preferred stance, and should see it as practice in playing devil's advocate.



Box 18.11 Activity: Brainstorm

In order to be patentable an invention must be 'novel', not occurring in nature. This clause has been deemed to be satisfied in the case of a gene sequence by the isolation of that gene for its normal context. Can participants think of ways in which the following could be made novel on this model:

- water
- gravity
- the human eye
- grass

Participants might be asked to conduct a search of existing patents to see if any of their suggested 'inventions' have already been patented. The website of the UK Patent Office is: <http://www.ipo.gov.uk/types/patent.htm>.

**Box 18.12 Activity: Web research**

Find out whether the ruling in the *Bilski* case was overturned, and if it was whether this led to an appeal in the *Myriad* case.

Use this, and the results of putting 'Patenting the Stuff of Life' into a search engine, to construct a 'for' and 'against' case for patenting an isolated gene sequence.

**Box 18.13 Activity: Small group presentations**

Participants should be divided into small groups and asked to prepare a presentation giving the 'for' and the 'against' in the case of patenting DNA. Box 18.10 will help them on the nature of patents.

**Box 18.14 Activity: Group discussion**

After performing an internet search about Synthia and/or looking at Box 21.18, participants should, as a group, discuss the patent that might reasonably be granted to Venter as recognition of his development of the world's first 'built from scratch' organism. In particular the group should discuss whether Venter should be granted a patent over the method used to build Synthia.