Who Monitors Biobanks?

The Need for an Oversight Authority

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Abstract

Biobanks are essential for developing innovative solutions to address human health challenges. At the same time such biobanks pose unique legal and ethical challenges, and raise many as yet unanswered questions, including how the collection of biological samples and information should be governed. I suggest that biobanks should have a clear regulatory structure and oversight system. I examine, in particular, the need for an oversight authority, arguing that the self-governance trend is not sufficient enough to ensure that all biobanks have proper governance practices, and that some formal regulation is needed to protect the integrity of research participants and to guarantee the security and confidentiality of the participants’ information. I suggest that robust biobank governance mechanisms require not only their own governance system but that these must necessarily involve a formal oversight body by the state for licensing and monitoring and which has the power to impose sanctions.