Editorial

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I was recently invited to write a paper on community genetics for a Dutch periodical. The editor in chief asked me to pay special attention to the difference, if any, between community genetics and eugenics. The task should not be too difficult. Community genetics and eugenics differ both in their goals and in the means used to achieve these goals. The aim of community genetics is to empower individuals to apply knowledge of genetics for their own benefit. It is only fair that not just the few individuals who find their way to genetics services are able to profit from this knowledge. This is why a community approach is needed. The goal of eugenics, on the other hand, is not the benefit of the individual, but the interest of society as a whole, or the interest of future generations. As a consequence, individuals are valued less and coercion can become one of the means to achieve these goals [1]. Community genetics, on the contrary, respects autonomy and favours informed decision-making by the individual.

Earlier this year, I had the honour of organising the first workshop on community genetics at the annual meeting of the European Society of Human Genetics in Geneva. In my introductory talk, I suggested that we should pay more attention to developing appropriate means for

the evaluation of community genetics. Classical measures, such as uptake rates, reproductive choices, or proportion of affected births avoided do not reflect the ethical aspects hinted at above. A comparable situation exists in clinical genetics. Here, new measures that reflect whether the counsellee feels he or she has profitted by the counselling or not, are being developed [2]. Who will take up the challenge to create appropriate means to evaluate the impact of community genetics on individuals?

In the meantime, with this issue we are entering the second year of our journal *Community Genetics*. New manuscripts on interesting subjects are now coming in regularly. We believe that this reflects a growing faith from the research community in the viability of our endeavour. Hang on! We are moving forward, full speed.

References

- 1 ASHG Statement: Eugenics and the misuse of genetic information to restrict reproductive freedom. *Am J Hum Genet* 1999;64:335–338.
- 2 Berkenstadt M, Shiloh S, Barkai G, Bat-Miriam-Katznelson M, Goldman B: Perceived personal control (PPC): A new concept in measuring outcome of genetic counseling. *Am J Med Genet* 1999;82:53–59.