Pioneers in medicine

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ERRATUM

In the November 2003 issue, we published an error in the goal of the Estonian Genome Project. The actual goal is to extract at least 1 mg, not 1 μ g, of DNA from participants' blood samples. The correct paragraph is printed below:

Probably the most striking feature of those involved with the EGP is their apparent willingness to make do with what they have to make it a success. The laboratory may be missing the sophisticated instrumentation that one would expect from a similar facility in a richer Western country, but it is definitely rich with the excitement of being a pioneer and with the keenness to improvise and solve problems. Samples and consent forms are taken by physicians from nearly all over Estonia and are delivered to the central laboratory by a private courier service that usually transports cash. From the time that a physician confirms that he has taken a blood sample, the clock starts ticking, as the software allows only 48 hours before samples and consent form must arrive in Tartu. The most common error is that physicians forget to sign the consent form, which means that the blood sample is not accepted until the form is returned to the doctor for signing. As Dagni Krinka, head of the laboratory, recollected, in one case, a consent form was redelivered by the courier service after 47 hours and 30 minutes—the driver had to run a couple of red lights to make it in time. So far they have not lost a single sample, she proudly claimed. On arrival at the laboratory, the blood samples are recoded to make them anonymous—the keys are stored in a computer in a safe room to which only a handful of people have access—and processed immediately. As Krinka said, their goal is to extract at least 1 mg of DNA from the blood samples, and this is much easier in the winter when many people are sick and have more leukocytes in their blood. "I don't like the summer," she commented. At the time of writing, most regions in Estonia were already participating in the project, except those that are populated mainly by Russians who speak little or no Estonian. For these areas, the consent form, health-data questionnaire and all information material had to be translated into Russian. Although this was mostly complete by September, the EGP was still translating the education materials used in training nurses and physicians—every health professional participating in the EGP has to undergo a four-day training course.

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