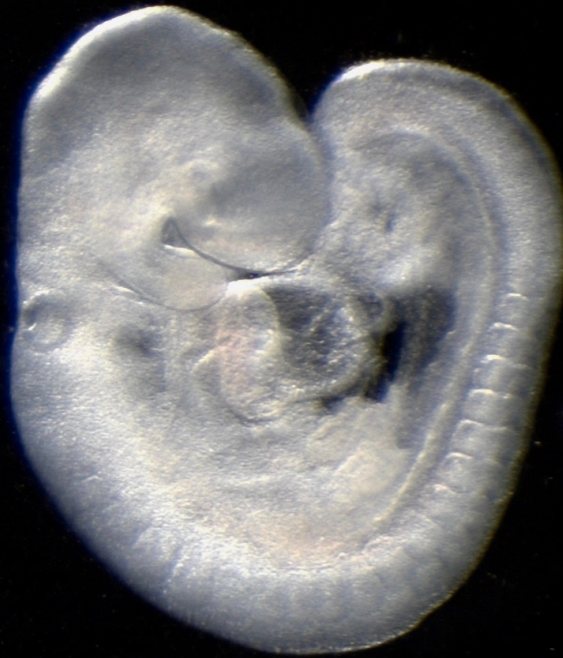


# A Nonlinear Story of Development

Questioning Assumptions and Following Curiosity



Daisy Robinton, Ph.D.

*University of California, Los Angeles*

*March 5, 2020*

Me



Lily



HC70A 2006



HC70AL 2006

HC70A, 2008



HC70A, 2008



HC70A, 2009



# Imposter syndrome is real

## REVIEW

doi:10.1038/nature10761

### The promise of induced pluripotent stem cells in research and therapy

Daisy A. Robinton<sup>1-5</sup> & George Q. Daley<sup>1-5</sup>

The field of stem-cell biology has been catapulted forward by the startling development of reprogramming technology. The ability to restore pluripotency to somatic cells through the ectopic co-expression of reprogramming factors has created powerful new opportunities for modelling human diseases and offers hope for personalized regenerative cell therapies. While the field is racing ahead, some researchers are pausing to evaluate whether induced pluripotent stem cells are indeed the true equivalents of embryonic stem cells and whether subtle differences between these types of cell might affect their research applications and therapeutic potential.



CellPress

Cancer Cell  
Article

### *Lin28b* Is Sufficient to Drive Liver Cancer and Necessary for Its Maintenance in Murine Models

Liem H. Nguyen,<sup>1,8</sup> Daisy A. Robinton,<sup>2,8</sup> Marc T. Seligson,<sup>2,8</sup> Linwei Wu,<sup>1,3</sup> Lin Li,<sup>1</sup> Dinesh Rakheja,<sup>4</sup> Sarah A. Comerford,<sup>5</sup> Saleh Ramezani,<sup>6</sup> Xiankai Sun,<sup>6</sup> Monisha S. Parikh,<sup>1</sup> Erin H. Yang,<sup>1</sup> John T. Powers,<sup>2</sup> Gen Shinoda,<sup>2</sup> Samar P. Shah,<sup>2</sup> Robert E. Hammer,<sup>7</sup> George Q. Daley,<sup>2,\*</sup> and Hao Zhu<sup>1,\*</sup>

Developmental Cell

Short Article

CellPress

### The *Lin28/let-7* Pathway Regulates the Mammalian Caudal Body Axis Elongation Program

Daisy A. Robinton,<sup>1,2,3,4</sup> Jérôme Chal,<sup>4,5,6</sup> Edroaldo Lummertz da Rocha,<sup>1,3,4</sup> Areum Han,<sup>1,2,3,4</sup> Alena V. Yermalovich,<sup>1,2,3,4</sup> Masayuki Oginuma,<sup>4,5,6</sup> Thorsten M. Schlaeger,<sup>1,4</sup> Patrícia Sousa,<sup>1,2,3,4</sup> Antony Rodriguez,<sup>7</sup> Achia Urbach,<sup>8</sup> Olivier Pourquié,<sup>4,5,6</sup> and George Q. Daley<sup>1,2,3,4,9,\*</sup>

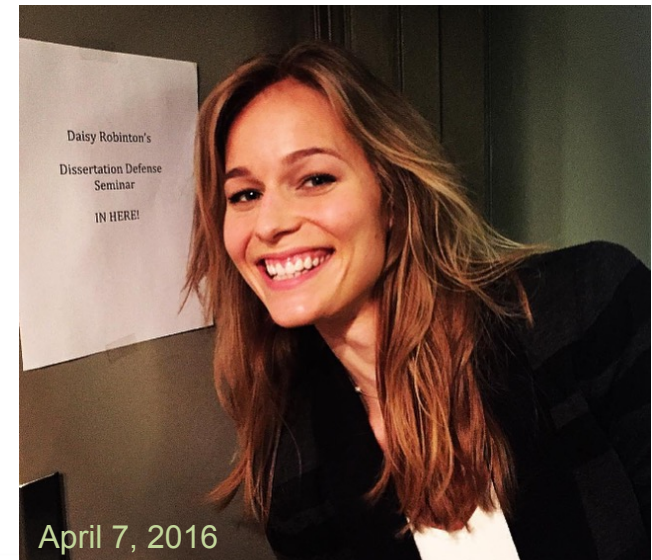
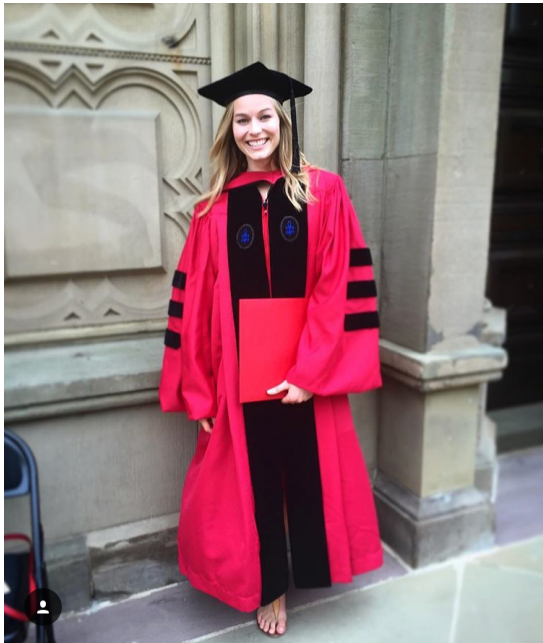
# (You can call me Dr. Daisy)

## REVIEW

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Even you can be a scientist.



Even you can be a ~~scientist~~.

artist

writer

lawyer

storyteller

entrepreneur

# Why pick just one...?

What if you could start over and take the career path most different from the one you're on? Let us help you.

The Labor Department keeps detailed and at times delightfully odd records on the skills and tasks required for each job. Some of them are physical: trunk strength, speed of limb movement, the ability to stay upright. Others are more knowledge-based: economics and accounting, physics, programming. Together, they capture the essence of what makes a job distinctive.

We've used these records to determine what each job's polar opposite would be.

Enter any job. We'll tell you its opposite:

The opposite job of a **biological scientist** is a **model**.

# Pursuing opposites leads to a wide breadth of skill development

The opposite job of a **biological scientist** is a **model**.

## Biological Scientists use these skills the most

- 1 Interpreting the meaning of information for others
- 2 Biology
- 3 Thinking creatively
- 4 Mathematics
- 5 Interacting with computers
- 6 Inductive reasoning
- 7 Ability to organize groups in different ways
- 8 Processing information
- 9 Analyzing data or information
- 10 Written comprehension

## Models use these skills the most

- 1 Ability to maintain balance
- 2 Gross body coordination
- 3 Trunk strength
- 4 Ability to reach with arms, hands and legs
- 5 Performing general physical activities
- 6 Performing for or working directly with the public
- 7 Technology design
- 8 Stamina
- 9 Fine arts
- 10 Dynamic strength

# ...and filling in skill gaps that a single professional pursuit can leave open

## Biological Scientists use these skills the least

- 1 Static strength
- 2 Ability to react quickly in response to signals
- 3 Ability to reach with arms, hands and legs
- 4 Public safety and security
- 5 Ability to to time movements in anticipation of moving objects
- 6 Performing general physical activities
- 7 Customer and personal service
- 8 Reaction time
- 9 Handling and moving objects
- 10 Ability to coordinate two or more limbs

## Models use these skills the least

- 1 Monitor processes, materials or surroundings
- 2 Identifying objects, actions and events
- 3 Making decisions and solving problems
- 4 Processing information
- 5 Estimating the quantifiable characteristics of products, events or information
- 6 Finger dexterity
- 7 Getting information
- 8 Pattern recognition
- 9 Near vision
- 10 Information ordering



Developmental biologist Daisy Robinton earns extra cash by modelling for athletic companies such as Reebok.

#### OUTSIDE THE LAB

# Side jobs for scientists

*Paid work beyond the bench can offer a welcome source of income to cash-strapped junior researchers and provide opportunities for career development.*

BY ELIE DOLGIN

Daisy Robinton expected to study mouse models of development when she started her PhD seven years ago, not to become a model herself. She quickly found success in her research, showing that a gene involved in embryonic-stem-cell differentiation can also initiate liver cancer in later life (L. H. Nguyen *et al. Cancer Cell* **26**, 248–261; 2014), and co-authoring the most-cited review paper of all time on reprogrammed stem cells (D. A. Robinton and G. Q. Daley *Nature* **481**, 295–305; 2012).

But Robinton also found herself struggling to live on her modest PhD stipend, and started to look for extra work. That's why in

many Reebok stores today, a billboard bearing her life-size likeness is on display, strategically positioned to best display the company's latest product. Robinton now spends around two days each month at photo shoots, mostly for athletic-apparel companies. During her PhD programme, that work paid enough to nearly double her modest income, and it continues to ease her way financially while she completes her postdoc in neurodevelopment at Boston Children's Hospital in Massachusetts.

Robinton is one of many early-career researchers who take on jobs outside the lab to help balance the books. "Being able to supplement my income instead of increasing my debt load was a big deal," says Robinton. She makes up for lost research hours by working more

on evenings and at weekends, and declines fashion work that cuts into her lab time. "My number-one priority will always be my science," she says.

Her attitude is the right one for any junior researcher considering work outside the lab, says Alaina Levine, a science and engineering careers consultant in Tucson, Arizona. Graduate students and postdocs need to think strategically, Levine says, about whether a side gig will support their overall career plan (or at least their happiness and well-being) and whether they realistically have the time.

In addition to extra cash, a part-time second job can yield opportunities for skill development and professional advancement, Levine adds. Yet any such work must come in lieu ►

Cross-pollination of ideas

Practicing communication of your work

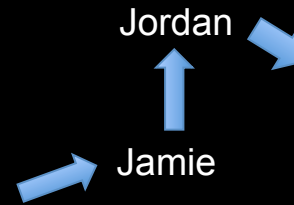
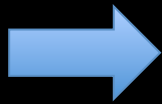
Testing your assumptions

Transferring skills from one context to the next

Create new avenues of motivation and inspiration

Bootstrapping energy

# Explore your Curiosity and NETWORK!



Weird and Wonderful



Forbes  
30  
UNDER  
30

## SCIENCE

Discovering new worlds, in our cells and outer space

Edited by Alex Knapp, Matt Perez and Sarah Hedgecock

# Sharing science with the world

The End of Ageing

18 / 11 / 2016

**TED<sup>x</sup>LondonSalon**  
x = independently organized TED event

POWERED BY THE  
SCIENCE MUSEUM

**TED<sup>x</sup>London**

**TED<sup>x</sup>**

© Keoma Zec Photography

# Building bridges and expanding impact



*Building relationships  
across industries*

*Bringing science to  
influencers and beauty  
brands*





# Wearing Multiple Hats

*E = embryonic day after fertilization*



**Science Writer & Strategist**

*BrainMind*

**Biology & Innovation Consultant**

*lululemon athletica*

**Model**

*New York Models, SLU, Maggie Inc*

**Visting Fellow**

*Weill Cornell School of Medicine*

**Scientist in Residence**

*Cambria Biosciences*

**Molecular Biologist**

# Embryonic Development of the Mouse



*E = embryonic day after fertilization*



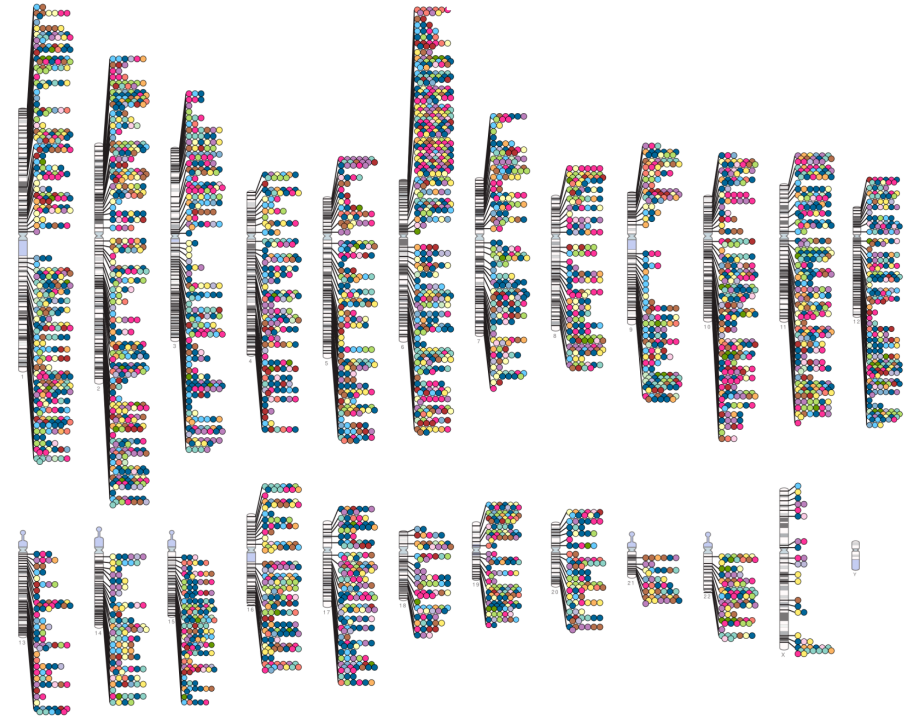
# From Genomes to Genomic Therapeutics



~ 6,000  
Diseases caused  
by genetic  
mutations



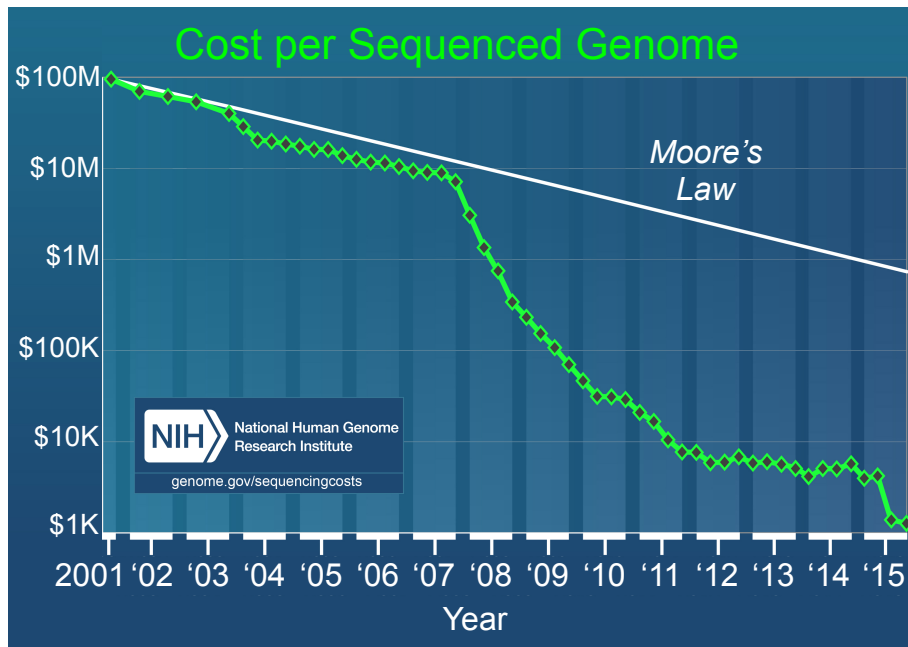
~ 95%  
Have no approved  
therapy



***Each GWAS association offers a potential clue about disease mechanisms.***



# We have entered the age of the *Genetic Revolution*



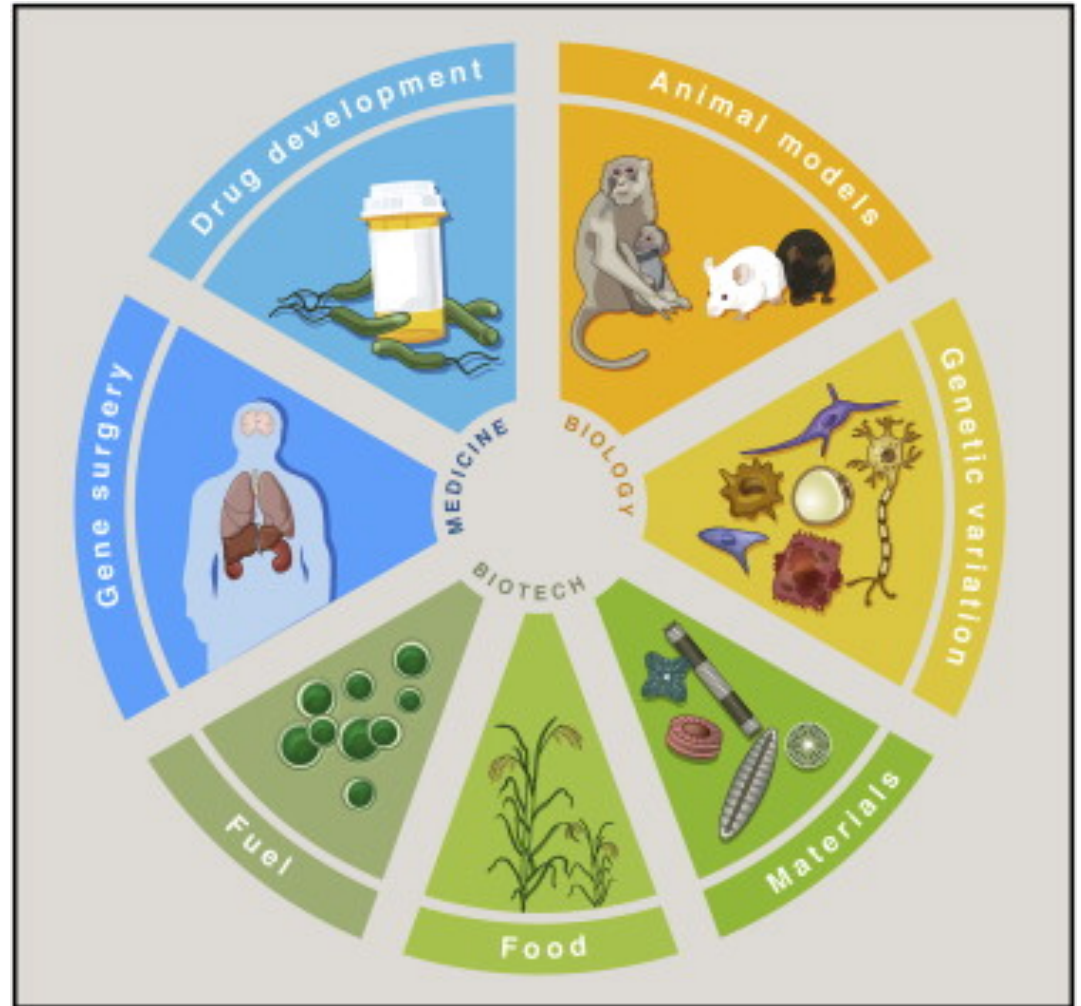
The next wave of discovery in common diseases is likely to be driven by the growth of large population biobanks that combine:

**genome-wide genetic information**  
with  
**extensive phenotypic information,**  
and in some cases –  
lifestyle,  
diet,  
and other environmental exposures,

***all measured on the same individuals.***

# CRISPR-Cas9 has Transformed Biology

Ease of use & efficiency has led to the wide adoption of this technology in research and beyond.



# Targeted genome editing has rapidly accelerated our ability to assess gene function

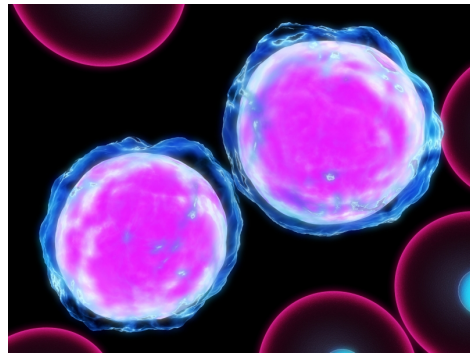


<http://www.publicdomainpictures.net/>

*Capability to introduce targeted alterations into \*ANY specific DNA sequence with high efficiency*

- **This capability did not exist before for most organisms/cell types**
- Broadly useful for practicing reverse genetics
- Also has therapeutic potential for wide range of inherited diseases

# Genetic Diagnostics Enable Personalized Medicine



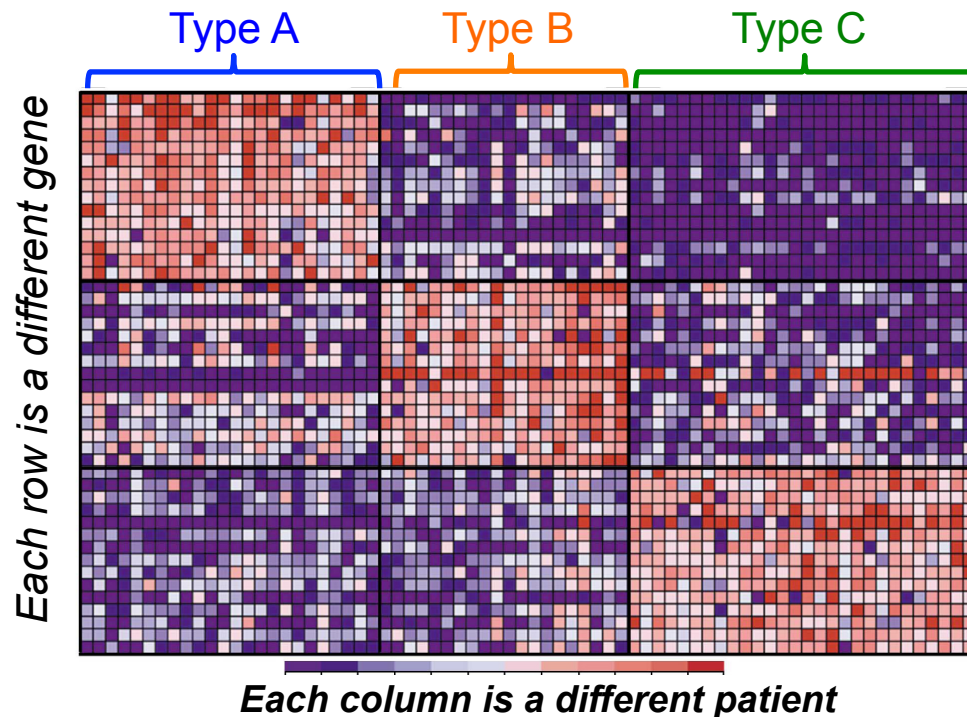
Leukemia cells



Extract RNA



Detect gene expression



Patients of type **A**, **B**, or **C** leukemia exhibit different gene expression patterns (RNA levels).

Treatment is specific to each type of leukemia; successful treatment requires early and accurate diagnosis

**Diagnosis based on these levels is 95% accurate.**



# Traditional vs. Personalized Medicine

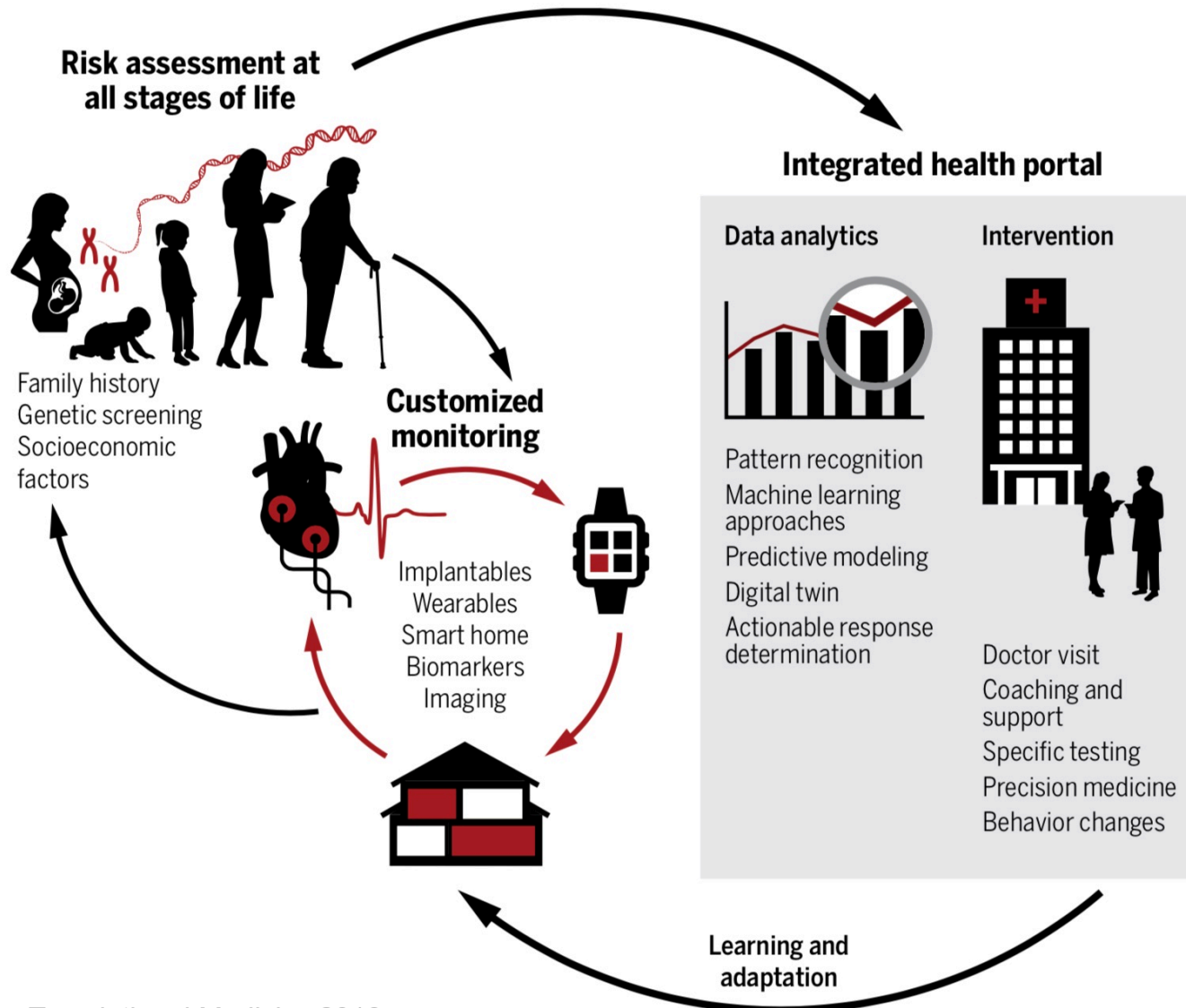
- **Traditional medicine:** diagnose based on symptoms, family history, and laboratory data; treat with the therapies thought to best fight the diagnosed disease
- **Personalized medicine:** diagnose as above, but **also use the patient's DNA sequence**; treat with the therapies thought to best fight the diagnosed disease given the patient's genetic makeup

Is a drug likely to be toxic to me?

What is my risk of developing a certain disease?

Which drugs will be effective in treating my disease?

# Gene editing is ushering in an era of *Precision Health* and Predictive or Preventative Medicine



# Personalized medicine and the economics of drug development

500,000 patients,  
all taking one drug



NON-RESPONDERS AND TOXIC RESPONDERS



Treat with  
alternative  
drug or dose

RESPONDERS AND PATIENTS NOT  
PREDISPOSED TO TOXICITY



Treat with  
conventional  
drug or dose

100,000  
patients per drug



NON-RESPONDERS AND TOXIC RESPONDERS



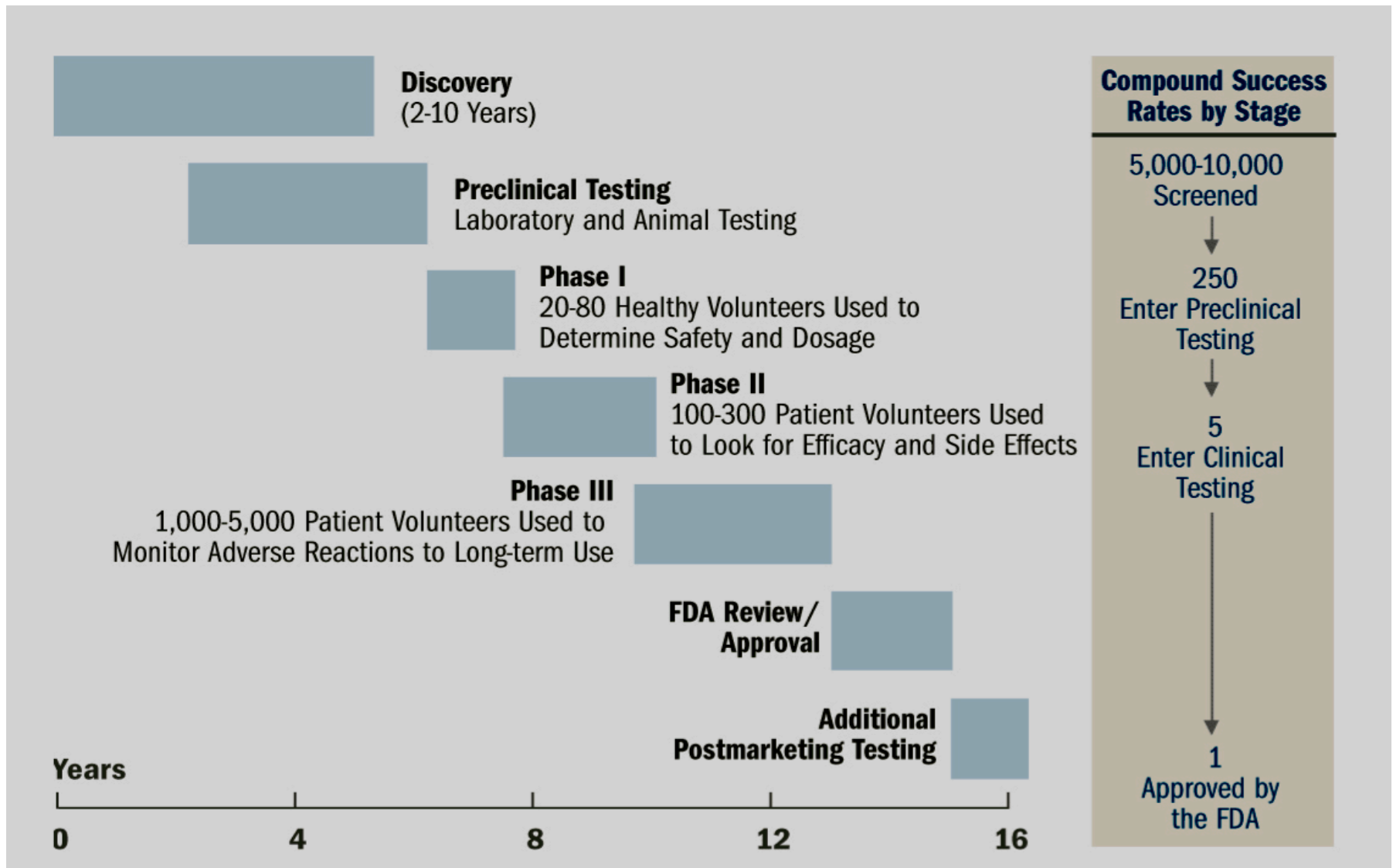
RESPONDERS AND PATIENTS NOT  
PREDISPOSED TO TOXICITY



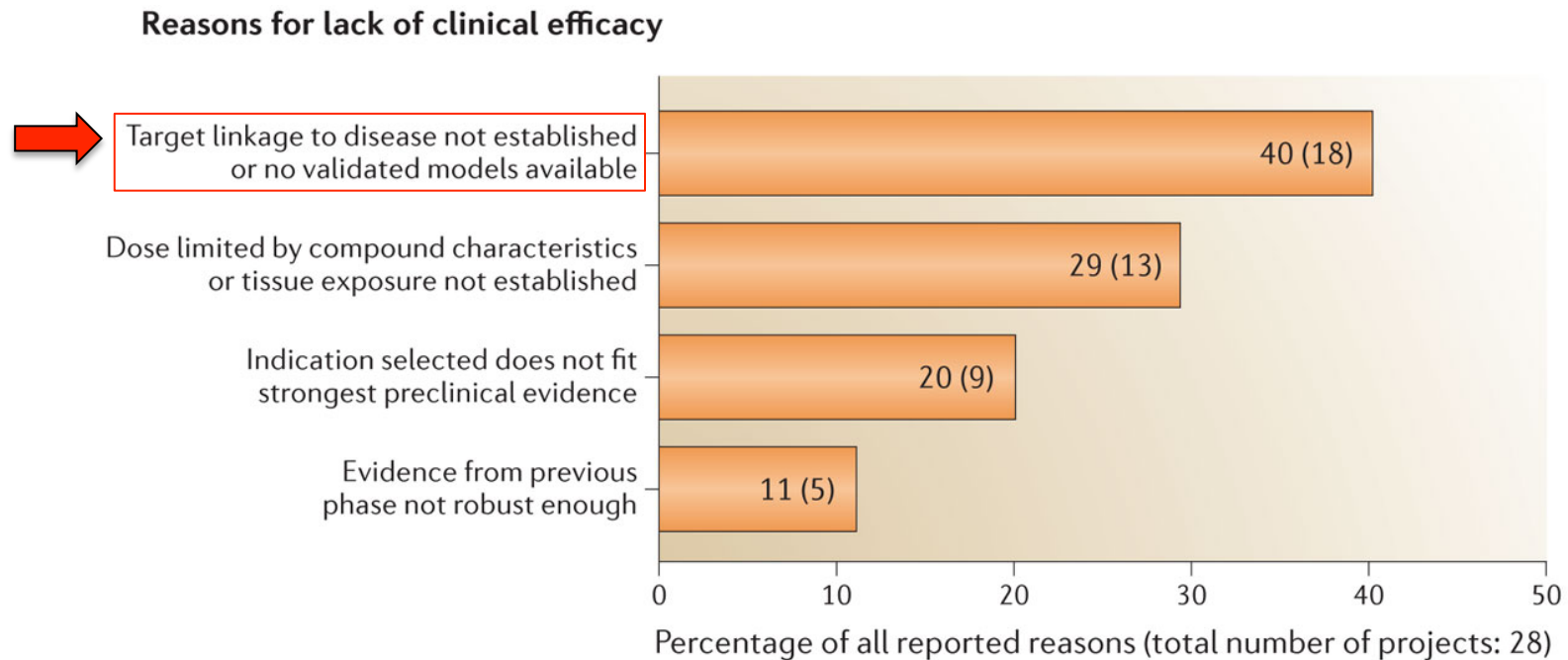
3,000 patients  
per drug

*Personalized medicine can increase drug effectiveness,  
but decreases number of potential patients and  
economic motivation to develop drugs*

# Drug Development is Very Difficult



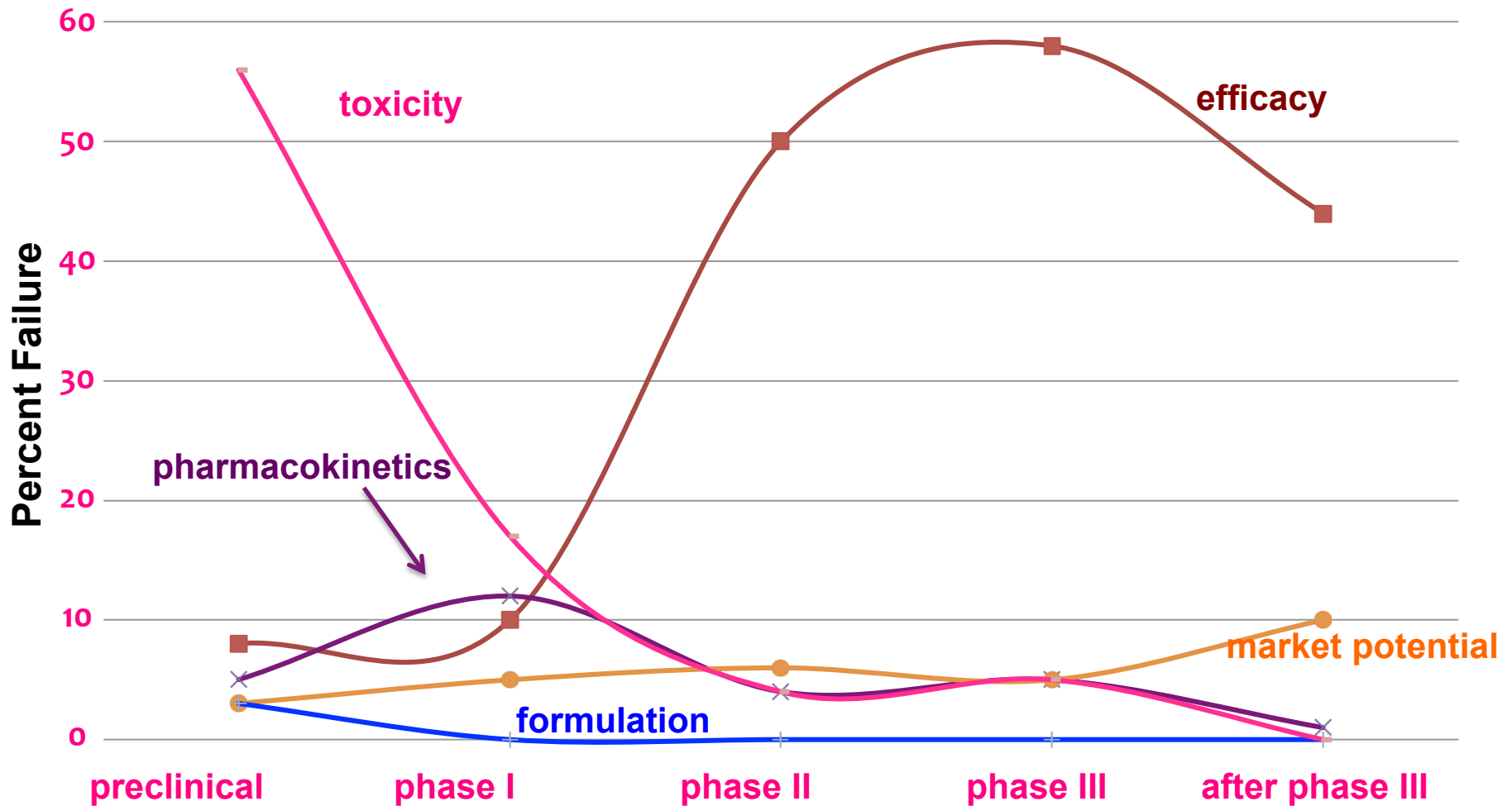
# Most failure is attributed to poor preclinical models



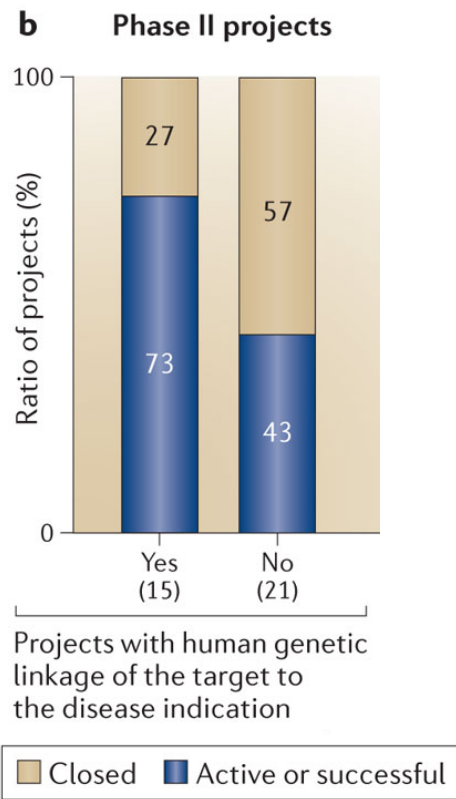
**Less than 5% of potential drugs are successful in reaching the market.**

It is argued that most of this failure is due to the **inadequacies of preclinical models of disease**, and our **lack of understanding of human biology**.

# Why most candidates fail clinical trials



# Genetic linkage of drug target to disease indication improves success rate

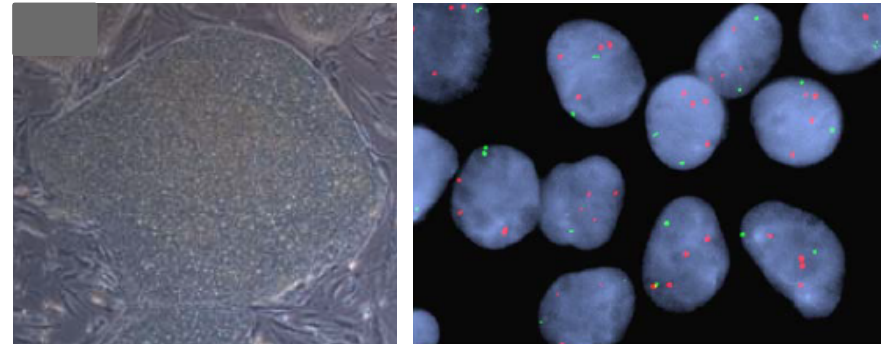


**“73% of projects with some genetic linkage of the target to the disease were active or successful in Phase II compared with 43% of projects without such data.”**

With growing datasets, genetics will be helpful in **stratifying patient populations for a more personalized treatment course**, rather than a “one size fits all” approach

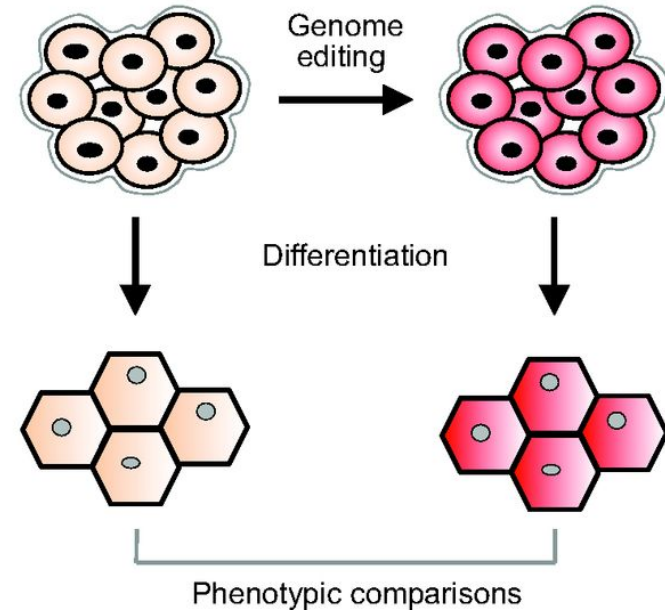
# Using CRISPR to make customized cell lines

- Previously not possible to **efficiently** modify mammalian cells genetically
- Wide variety of cells have been modified including ESCs, iPSCs, HSCs, and many somatic cells
- Can now create mutated lines for drug screening, disease modeling, or genetic analysis
- Can *correct* disease mutations in patient-derived cell lines



Sebastiano et al., *Stem Cells* 2011

Maeder et al., *Mol Cell* 2008

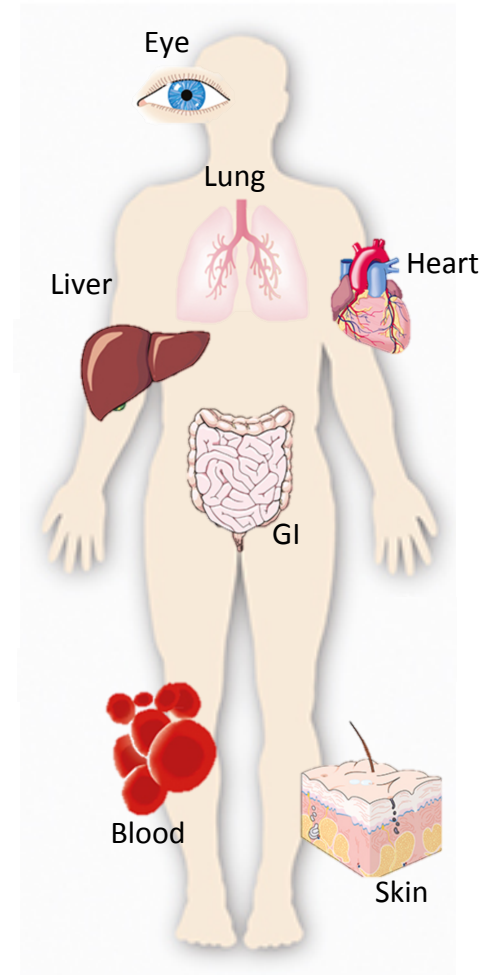


from Musunuru K, *Dis. Model. Mech.* 2013

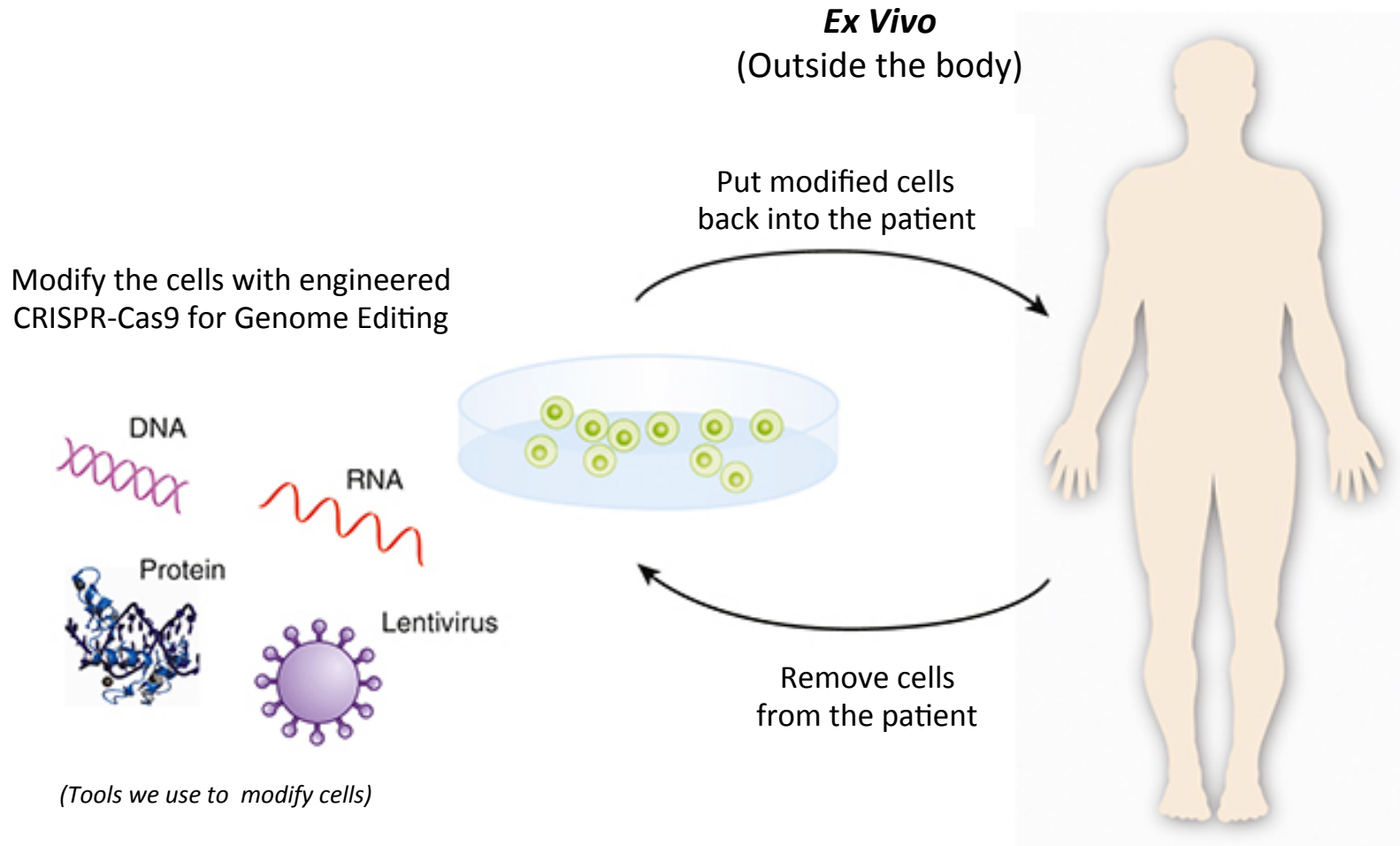
**Learning about human biology in humans instead of animal models**



# How are we moving forward with actual gene editing of humans?



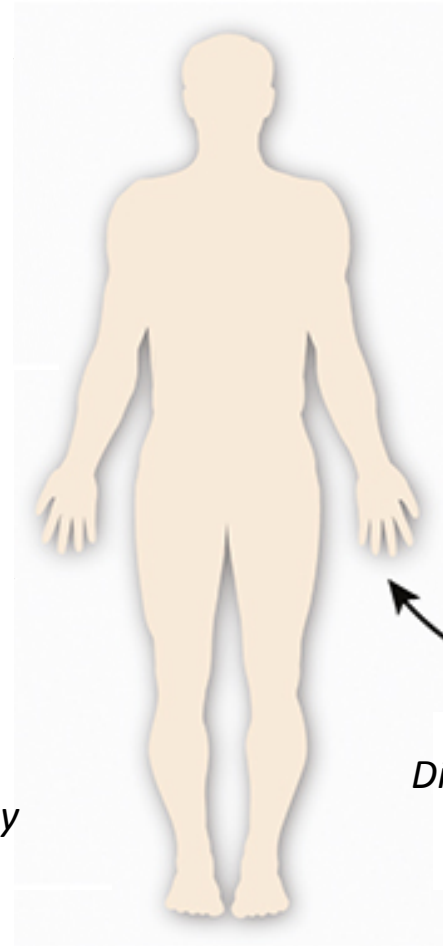
# How are we moving forward with actual gene editing of humans?



# “*In vivo*” gene editing is much more challenging...

Delivery is a major challenge

- Eye**  
*Retinal Dystrophies*
- Liver**  
*Hemophilia*  
*MPS*
- Lung**  
*Cystic Fibrosis*
- Muscle**  
*Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy*



***In Vivo***  
(Inside the body)



AAV



Lipid nanoparticle

*Direct delivery of gene editing tools into the patient*

NEWS • 22 JANUARY 2019

# CRISPR-baby scientist fired by university

*Investigation by Chinese authorities finds He Jiankui broke national regulations in his controversial work on gene-edited babies.*



# Fewer Restrictions Allowing for Faster 'Progress'

**China has less intensive regulation –**

>11 genome editing clinical trials underway with at least 86 cancer patients treated

**“China shouldn't have been the first one to do [a human genome editing trial] ... but there are fewer restrictions.”**

*Dr. Shixiu Wu | Leader of China's first trial at Hangzhou Cancer Hospital*

*WSJ Report highlights instances of less stringent, inconsistent review processes for human trials faced by Chinese researchers compared with their Western counterparts.*

*US operations face hospital review boards, ethics committees and government agencies before receiving approval.*

Are there problematic elements to this differential regulatory structure between countries?

*What about when disparate rules are made across countries, and/or inside vs outside the US?*

# “Asilomar 2015”

1970's



Copyright © National Academy of Sciences

2015



Risdon Photography



2015

Risdon Photography



2015

Risdon Photography

International Human Gene Editing Summit 2015  
by The National Academies



# Key Ethical Considerations

## **Safety**

*Weighing benefits vs unintended risks*

## **Germline Editing**

*Informed Consent*

## **Incorporating Societal Values**

*Into clinical applications and policy discussions*

## **Governing**

*Potential for differential regulation across nations*

## **Access, Justice and Equality**

Who can afford it? Does it deepen socioeconomic inequality?



# China, the US and the UK agree that viable human embryos can be used for *research*

NEWS IN FOCUS

BIOTECHNOLOGY

## Embryo editing gets green light

*UK decision sets precedent for research on editing genomes of human embryos.*

At the international Summit on Human Gene Editing in 2015, scientists from the US, the UK and China were in agreement that **viable human embryos can be used for research**, but it would be **unacceptable to alter the DNA of these embryos in clinical settings**.

The successful applicant is developmental biologist Kathy Niakan, at the Francis Crick Institute in London. Her team plans to use the CRISPR–Cas9 technique in healthy human embryos to alter genes that are active just after fertilization. The researchers will stop the experiments after seven days, when the embryos will be destroyed.

# What does the future hold?

*What does it mean to change your genetic destiny?*



# The future of *in vivo* gene editing... Gene Vaccines!



OUTLOOK • 07 MARCH 2018

## A CRISPR edit for heart disease

*A one-off injection to reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease is now a prospect thanks to advances in gene editing.*

Consider this scenario: it's 2037, and a middle-aged person can walk into a health centre to get a vaccination against cardiovascular disease. The injection targets cells in the liver, tweaking a gene that is involved in regulating cholesterol in the blood. The simple procedure trims cholesterol levels and dramatically reduces the person's risk of a heart attack.

*\*Some experts think this could become a reality within 5-10 years!*

# Today's standard-of-care versus the future

**OUTLOOK** · 07 MARCH 2018

## A CRISPR edit for heart disease

*A one-off injection to reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease is now a prospect thanks to advances in gene editing.*

### **Standard of Care TODAY**

Current antibody-based therapies can cut the risk of heart attack by 27% and stroke by 21%, when administered in combination with statins. Lifestyle changes also important.

#### **Treatment:**

Regular infusions of drugs for the rest of a patient's life

#### **Cost:**

US \$14,500/year

# Gene Vaccines in 2037 – who should receive these?



OUTLOOK · 07 MARCH 2018

## A CRISPR edit for heart disease

*A one-off injection to reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease is now a prospect thanks to advances in gene editing.*

*Should this type of treatment be administered to at-risk patients only?*

### Standard of Care 2037

Gene vaccine entailing a single injection of gene editing molecules targeted to the liver. Follow-up blood test to evaluate efficacy. Lifestyle...?

#### Treatment:

Single injection followed by efficacy screening

#### Cost:

\$\$\$?

**“You don’t necessarily want to treat people who haven’t got a disease yet”**

**Karel Moons, *clinical epidemiologist***

# Safety Considerations – Somatic Approach

**Do the benefits of genome editing justify the risks?**

How does gene editing compare to the risk in current therapeutic strategies?

Disease Type

Disease Progression

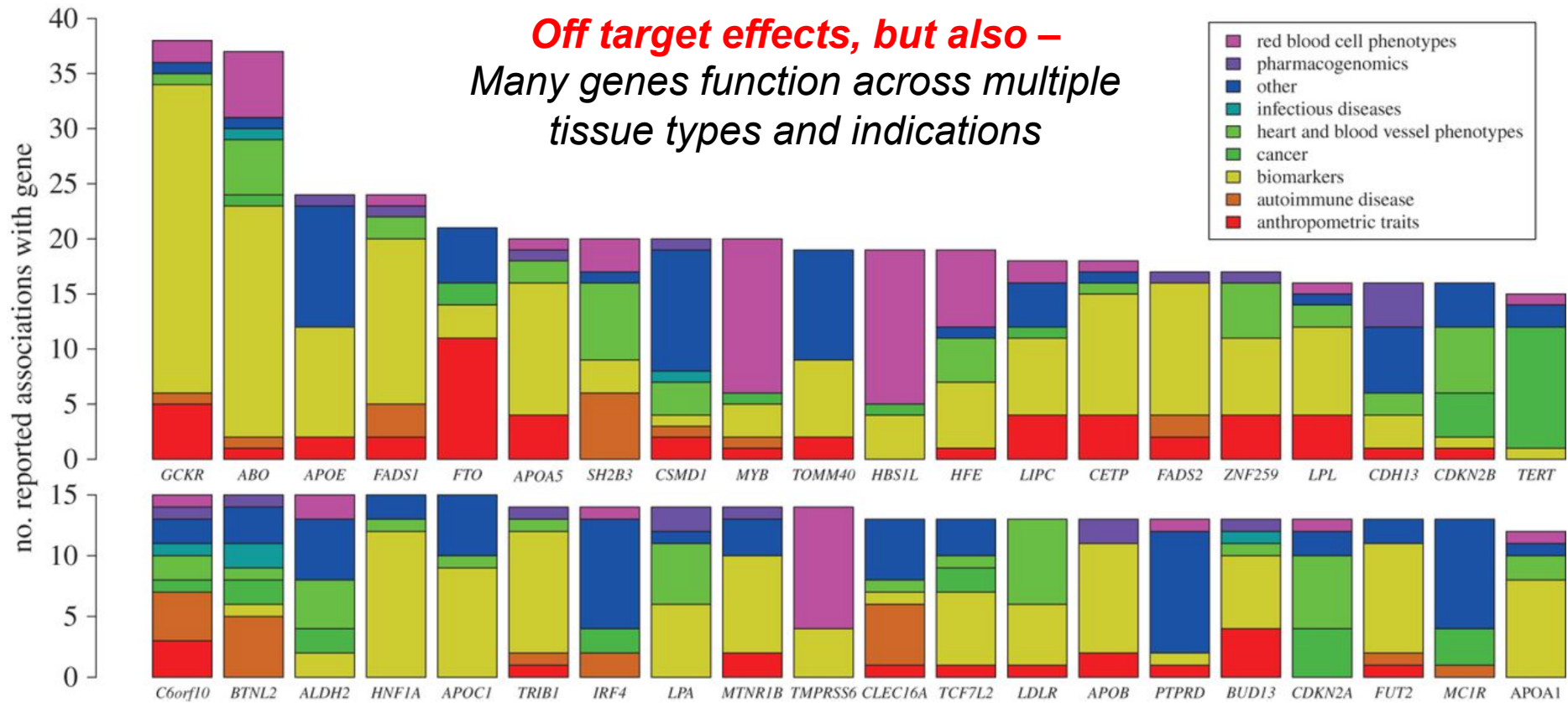
Types of Cells/Tissue Treated

Mode of Therapeutic Application

Other Therapeutic Options

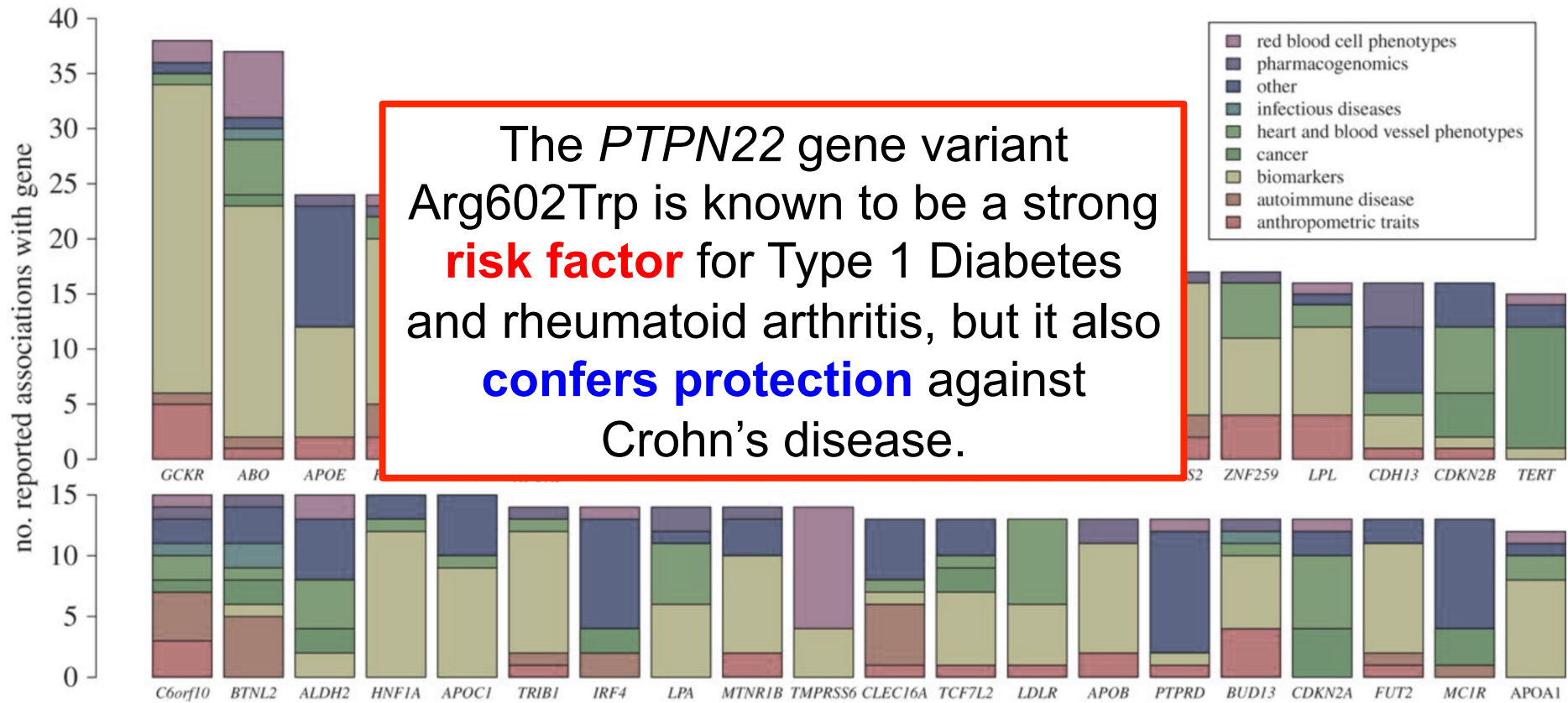
Likely Off-target Sites for Site to be Edited

# To keep in mind as we embark into gene editing therapeutics...



Barplot of the 40 genes in the NHGRI GWAS catalog (2014) that have the highest number of associations where they are listed as the reported gene.

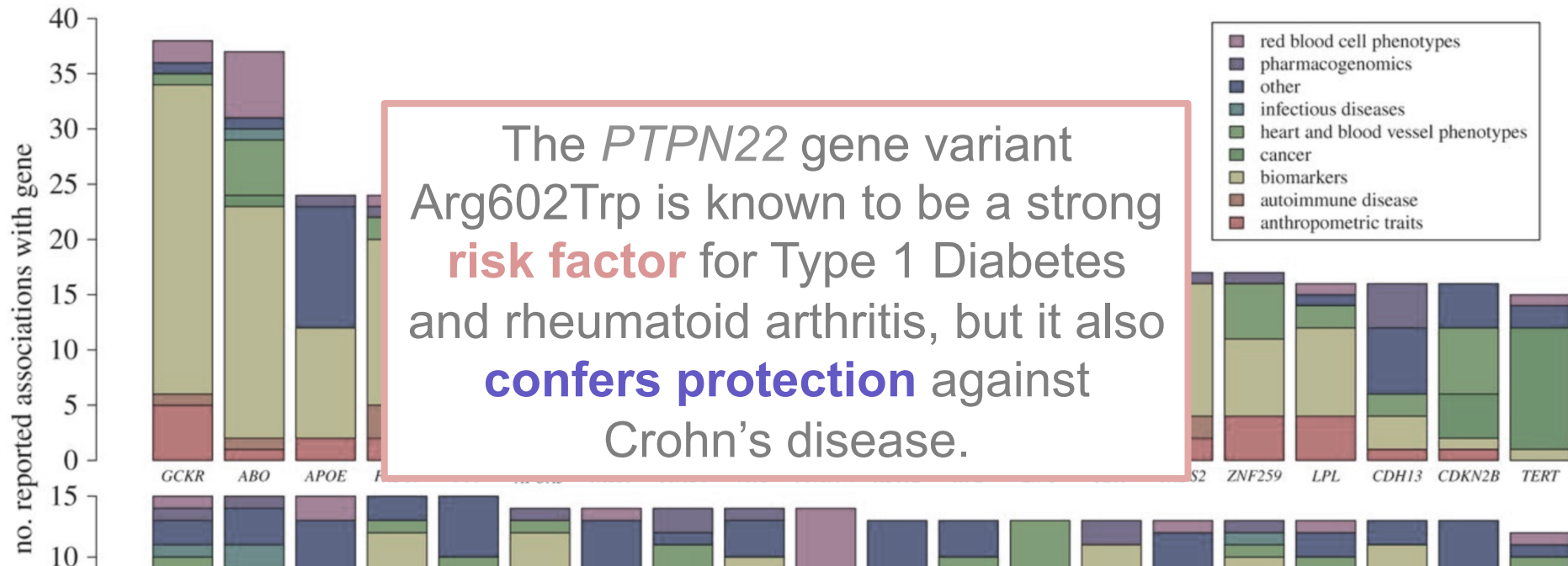
# Many genes function across multiple tissue types and indications



Barplot of the 40 genes in the NHGRI GWAS catalog (2014) that have the highest number of associations where they are listed as the reported gene.



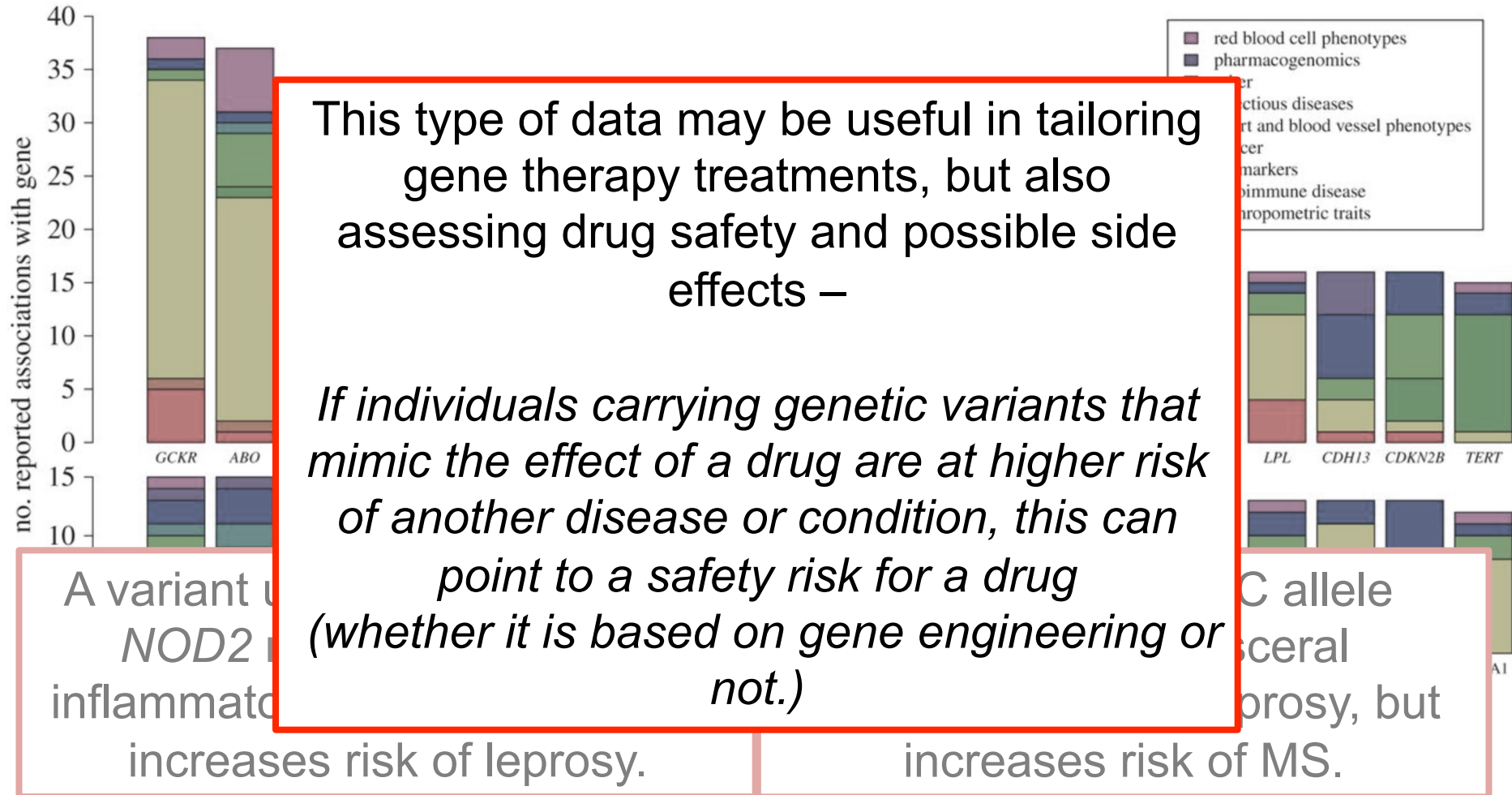
# Pleiotropy can potentially lead to conflicting evolutionary pressures



A variant upstream of the gene *NOD2* **reduces** for risk of inflammatory bowel disorder but **increases** risk of leprosy.

The DRB1\*15 MHC allele **protects** from visceral leishmaniasis and leprosy, but **increases** risk of MS.

# Pleiotropy can potentially lead to conflicting evolutionary pressures



This type of data may be useful in tailoring gene therapy treatments, but also assessing drug safety and possible side effects –

*If individuals carrying genetic variants that mimic the effect of a drug are at higher risk of another disease or condition, this can point to a safety risk for a drug (whether it is based on gene engineering or not.)*

A variant of *NOD2*... increases risk of leprosy.

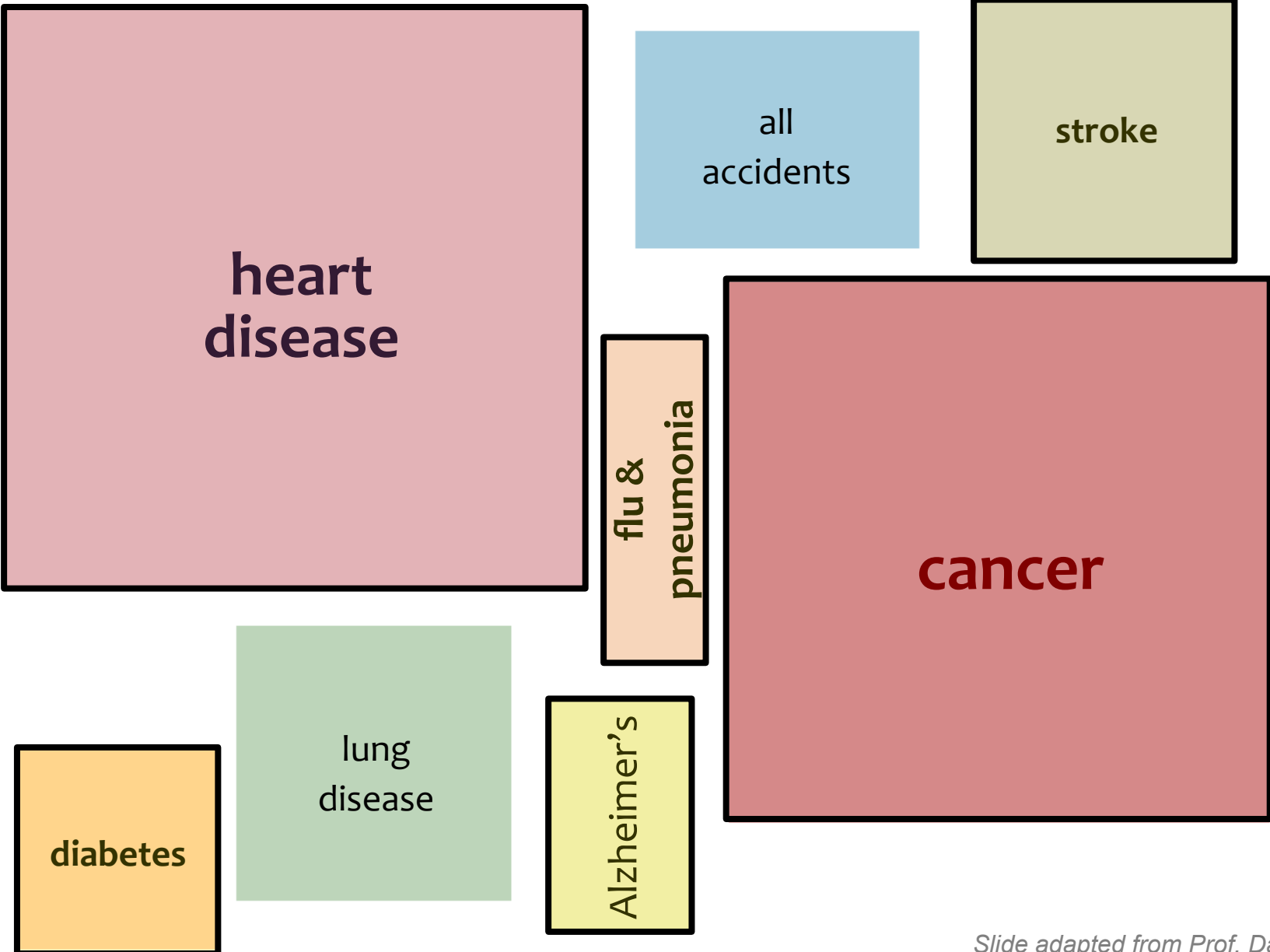
The C allele... increases risk of MS.

Assuming moderate risk, would you be open to gene therapy treatment to prevent diseases you are at risk for before their typical age of onset?

**Keep in mind:** *many commonly drugs have mild to moderate risk (birth control pills & blood clots, arthritis meds & liver damage, etc)*

Do you think safety testing needs to be modified for therapies designed for healthy people versus ill people?

As we get ahead of age-related diseases, will we also prolong human life?



# Can we treat aging as a disease?

“We take disease seriously, whereas we view processes of aging as simply being natural.”

*Irwin Rosenberg, Tufts University*

## **LIFE EXPECTANCY:**

1837 → ~ 45 years

2015 → ~87 years

## Fighting the inevitability of ageing

*The debilitating loss of muscle and strength that comes with age is being recognized as a disease that could be treated.*

“We know we’re an increasingly ageing population... One of the challenges for us is **how to make sure that those added years are quality years.**”

*Elaine Dennison, Epidemiologist*

Would you want to live to be 150?

# What does the future hold for genetic engineering of humans?

**It is becoming possible to correct disease genes**  
*(and pass those genetic fixes on to future generations)*



**How does informed consent work in this context?**

*Intervention to protect people from long-term disease can begin at, or even before, birth.*



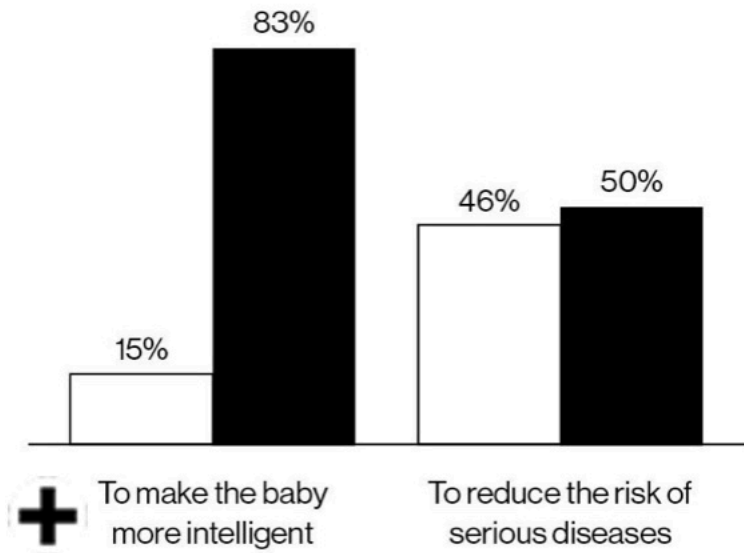
# Germline Editing – Where do we draw the line?

## Genetic Modification of Babies

Percentage of U.S. adults saying that changing a baby's genetic characteristics for each purpose is ...

Appropriate

Taking medical advances too far



*Updated figures suggest over 60% of the population agrees with disease-treating genome editing*

“If germ-line engineering becomes part of medical practice, it could lead to transformative changes in human well-being, with consequences to people’s life span, **identity**, and economic output.”

If you could choose to enhance protective traits in you or your offspring, would you?

Who should decide what traits we can and cannot edit in human embryos?

- A. The parents
- B. Scientists and/or medical doctors
- C. Bioethicists
- D. State and/or Federal government
- E. All of the above

# A number of genes could offer protective enhancements

**George Church:** “In addition to common variants of small impact and rare deleterious variants, there are **rare protective gene variants of large impact.**”

LRP5 (G171V/+) – Extra-strong bones

MSTN (-/-) – Lean muscles

SCN9A (-/-) – Insensitivity to pain

ABCC11 (-/-) – Low odor production

CCR5, FUT2 (-/-) – Virus resistance

PCSK9 (-/-) – Low coronary disease

APP (A673T/+) – Low Alzheimer’s risk

GHR, GH (-/-) – Low cancer

SLC30A8 (-/+) – Low T2 Diabetes

IFIH1 (E627X/+) – Low T1 Diabetes

**Will it be possible to “install” genes that offer lifelong protection against infection, Alzheimer’s, and maybe effects of aging?**

If you could choose to enhance yourself  
via gene editing in you or your offspring,  
would you?

How would you feel knowing your parents engineered you to enhance particular traits?

**Positively**

*I am the product of their creation  
(genetically and creatively)*

**Negatively**

*Others have no right to alter my unique  
genetic heritage*

# Will we one day directly alter human evolution?

Can we eradicate diseases like Huntington's the same way we've eradicated many diseases with vaccines –  
“prevent the propagation of human disease in future generations”



*“You can't retract a designer baby”*

Would you support a “reproductive quarantine” for individuals who have unexpectedly deleterious outcomes of germline genetic engineering?

What types of human germline modifications do you think are acceptable?

- A. Genetic disorders with no treatment options
- B. Genetic disorders with treatment options
- C. Trait enhancement
- D. A, B and C
- E. None of the above



Which concerns you most in relation to the use of genome editing of embryos for non-therapeutic modifications?

- A. Loss of human diversity
- B. Eugenics
- C. Both concern me equally
- D. Something else

# CRISPR-Cas9 has gone Hollywood

## What is the role of entertainment in biotechnology?

Science



Jennifer Lopez set to produce NBC bio-terror drama *C.R.I.S.P.R.*

By **Jessica Boddy** | Oct. 19, 2016, 11:00 AM



She's still Jenny from the block, but now **Jennifer Lopez is also the executive producer of a new drama called *C.R.I.S.P.R.***, *The Hollywood Reporter* writes. Each episode of the new J Lo-produced show, slated to air on NBC, will investigate a criminal bio-attack based on the CRISPR gene-editing technique, from a genetic assassination attempt on the president to the framing of an unborn child for murder. If the project moves forward (the script is still being written), the drama will center on a scientist and her former mentor as they battle for control over the human genome, the culmination of which could mean life or death for the entire human race. Don't stress over a real-life CRISPR though —these days, the technique is being used to **engineer pasta dishes**, not frame murders.

How does pop-culture's influence on emerging science and technology impact public opinion or sentiment?

Our visions of technology and design and entertainment and creativity have to be married with visions of humanity, compassion, and justice. And more than anything, for those of you who share that, I've simply come to tell you to keep your eyes on the prize, hold on.

**Bryan Stevenson** | *Human Rights Lawyer*

***Thank you!***