

Pathway Genomics launches public DNA testing

July 15 2009, by Glenn Chapman

A young US start-up brimming with medical research veterans brings genetic testing to the masses on Wednesday with an affordable, comprehensive DNA service for the public.

Pathway Genomics entered a growing direct-to-consumer (DTC) genetic testing market with its own laboratory in the Southern California city of San Diego and certification from state and federal agencies.

Genomics vowed to provide the most extensive [DNA analysis](#) at the lowest price -- about 250 dollars.

"Our goal is to keep a low cost and make this test available to anyone," Genomics founder and chief executive Jim Plante told AFP.

"I always felt that consumers didn't have direct access to [genetic information](#) in a way that was cost effective."

DTC genetics service 23andMe charged 999 dollars for full DNA analysis when it launched in 2006 but cut the price to 399 dollars last year as competitors raced into the market.

Complete genetic analysis for health and ancestry from DTC service deCODEme were priced at 985 dollars, according to its website Tuesday.

Genomics said it keeps costs low and quality high by running an in-house

lab equipped with technology whose cost has come down with advances in genetic testing.

Genomics offers extensive analysis of an individual's risk for diabetes, Alzheimer's or myriad other diseases, and claims it can trace people's [ancestry](#) back more than 150,000 years.

DNA analysis can also show what conditions parents might pass on to children or when drugs might affect people adversely.

"We felt it was the right time to put together a service like this," Plante said. "We see our clientele as people very interested in improving health and wellness."

Genomics developed a [saliva](#) collection kit so all people need do is "spit in a tube, screw on the cap and drop the tube in a return envelope" for delivery to the San Diego laboratory, Plante explained.

A Genomics team of science experts is headed by David Becker, known for his role in a 2008 breakthrough in identifying genes that appear to influence risk of Alzheimer's disease.

"We believe that through genetics, you can learn about yourself and take actions to improve your health and reduce your risk," Becker said.

"We look at genetics as one part of the whole person. On our road map is to work very closely with healthcare providers and integrate that into our service."

Genomics will also provide counseling and education to educate and counsel customers as well as doctors about ways lifestyle, heredity and genetics combine to influence health.

"Evaluating an individual's genetic profile is important, but it only reveals part of a person's health and [wellness](#)," Becker said.

"We want our customers to take control of their health by identifying areas in their life that they could change to reduce their risk for developing diseases."

Genomics "risk evaluations" include perspectives on people's chances of getting particular diseases compared to the overall population.

The firm's website at pathway.com has already received a "high percentage" of orders from Europe, South America and the Middle East, Plante said.

Genomics was launched as government officials grapple with whether DTC gene testing services should be more strictly controlled to assure people get reliable results and avoid the misuse of DNA information.

Under one adverse scenario, [health](#) insurance providers could deny healthy people policies based on medical risks identified by genetic analysis.

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