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Letter from the Editors

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Dear Reader,

On behalf of the editorial board and staff, we proudly present Volume 5, Issue 2 of the Health Law & Policy Brief. The tenth issue of our publication features the 2011 Health Law and Justice Initiative’s symposium on personalized medicine, as well as student articles addressing the topics of patent protection and information technology in health care and medicine. Taken together, these pieces highlight the complex role that scientific and technological advancement plays in society. Improvements in genetic testing, information technology, pharmaceuticals, and medical devices create exciting possibilities for persons and populations to attain the highest attainable standard of health, but also raise grave and vexing questions regarding health inequity, regulation, privacy, discrimination, ethics, and social justice.

The 2011 symposium delineates the legal, social, ethical, and political dimensions of personalized medicine. Panel I focuses on the possibilities, hurdles, and practical solutions of personalized medicine. By providing physicians and patients with treatment options that are specifically tailored to individual patients, personalized medicine may help patients achieve medically optimal outcomes. At the same time, however, personalized medicine comes with challenges. For example, personalized medicine may increase health inequities by offering new treatment options that may be affordable only to a select few and remain inaccessible to a large segment of the population. Panel II addresses ethical, budgetary, and privacy considerations. And Panel III focuses on the import of consumer participation in advancing the goals of personalized medicine.

The student articles focus on patent law to explore further the challenges that accompany innovations in medicine and health care. Tom Kniffen discusses how a recent federal court decision and the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act are likely to affect patent protection of genetic research. Providing more of an international context, Kim Speer examines the dual role that intellectual property protection plays in enabling pharmaceutical innovation and ensuring access to drugs in developing countries.

Finally, several student authors report on new developments in information technology in health care and medicine, and illuminate some of the ethical, regulatory, and privacy considerations involved. Like the symposium on personalized medicine, this series of short articles draws attention to the promise of technological and scientific innovation in medicine and health care, but also highlights some of the obstacles to fulfilling that promise.
Given the complex issues covered, we by no means present a definitive picture on any one of the topics presented, but rather seek to promote further debate and inquiry into the topics discussed in this issue. The opinions expressed by the panelists at the symposium and the student authors do not necessarily reflect the views of the Health Law & Policy Brief or the American University Washington College of Law.

We extend our gratitude to our faculty advisers, Professor Lindsay Wiley and Matthew Pierce, and our consulting advisor, Professor Corrine Parver. Without their sage counsel and generous support, this publication would not be possible. We also are enormously thankful to our dedicated, enthusiastic, and talented staff, who went above and beyond the call of duty to deliver this issue of the Brief. We would also like to thank Justin Shore for organizing the Health Law and Justice Initiative’s symposium on personalized medicine and for his overall assistance, especially with helping the Brief obtain office space.

And finally, we thank you for your readership. We look forward to bringing you more health law and policy scholarship in the future.

Sincerely,

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Editor-in-Chief  
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