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What We Should Talk About When We Talk About Gene Editing

Most of the literature on the ethics of germline gene editing has focused on broader philosophical and social issues about its use to enhance human characteristics. The breakneck pace of development towards potential clinical application of gene editing techniques has made more “ground floor” ethical issues extremely urgent. Three families of issues stand out: (1) research ethics issues about conducting experiments on gene editing, including questions about soliciting gamete donations from families dealing with inherited genetic disorders, and use, storage, and destruction of embryos involved in experiments; (2) design of future clinical trials of germline gene editing, including issues about storage of information for participants, informed consent, and long-term follow up of participants; and (3) issues about clinical use, including what clinical uses should be restricted (and how to accomplish such restrictions). As potential clinical application of germline gene editing gets closer, bioethicists must turn their attention to these urgent issues and fulfill their professional responsibility to advise the medical community and regulatory bodies.



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