The International Journal of Ethical Leadership

Volume 5 Article 3

2018

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Where Are They Now
Ten Years of Past Inamori Prize Winners

Francis S. Collins, 2008 Inamori Ethics Prize Recipient
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At the turn of the century, an international research group led by Francis S. Collins, successfully sequenced the three million DNA base pairs that make up the human genome, providing the global community a first look at the code that makes up human life. The success of the Human Genome Project, completed in 2003, has allowed researchers to learn more about hereditary influences of diseases like cancer and diabetes. The long-term impact of the Human Genome Project has exponential potential as researchers are just beginning to translate the information from the genetic code into tangible solutions for patients, leading to earlier detection of illness, new therapeutic interventions, and ultimately cures that can save lives.[1]

The revolutionary Human Genome Project was led by a biomedical scientist, Francis Collins. Collins is a physician-geneticist who, early in his career, developed innovative methods to isolate genes responsible in diseases such as cystic fibrosis and Huntington's disease. Collins became the director of the National Human Genome Research Institute (NHGRI) in 1993, where he oversaw large initiatives such as the Human Genome Project and the HapMap Project, which mapped common human genetic variation.[2] Collins stepped down as the director of the NHGRI in 2008, and in 2009, was appointed by President Barack Obama to become the director of the National Institutes of Health (NIH). Collins remains the active director of the NIH after being reappointed by President Donald Trump in 2017.[3]

As the director of the NIH, Collins oversees the largest supporter of biomedical research in the world. During his tenure, Collins has helped to found the National Center for Advancing Translational Sciences,[4] the Brain Research through Advancing Innovative Neurotechnologies Project,[5] and the Precision Medicine Initiative,[6] while simultaneously running his own lab at the NIH in the Medical Genomics and Metabolic Genetics Branch.[7] The landmark discoveries and scientific leadership of Collins have earned him prestigious recognitions such as his elections to the National Academy of Medicine and the National Academy of Science, his awarding of the

Presidential Medal of Freedom in November 2007, and his selection as the recipient of the National Medal of Science in 2009.

In addition to his scientific achievements, Collins has led the biomedical research community by example with his commitment to ethical and legal issues. Collins worked to protect the privacy of genetic information by helping to pass the Genetic Information and Nondiscrimination Act,[8] helped expand genetic research in Africa with the Human Heredity and Health in Africa (H3Africa) Project,[9] and helped shape controversial national policies on allowing the use of embryonic stem cells in research[10] and banning the use of chimpanzees in NIH-funded research.[11] Collins was awarded the inaugural Inamori Ethics Prize in 2008 for his commitment to ethical leadership and scientific achievements.[12]

Francis Collins is a revolutionary researcher, a humane scientist, and a charismatic leader. He has worked tirelessly to turn his discoveries into cures, and he is deeply committed to using his scientific discoveries for good in the world. Now, as the director of the NIH, he is leading other scientists to do the same.

Notes

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