Extension (Optional)

Should Employers Have Access to Genetic Test Results?

Estimated Time: 45 minutes

If you have another class period to devote to this work, you might want to explore this ethical question: Should employers be able to require and gain access to genetic testing results that could affect a person’s ability to do his or her job? Master 4.11: About Retinitis Pigmentosa will guide you and your students through an exploration of a degenerative eye condition. This case focuses on the following question:

Should airline companies be able to screen prospective pilots for associated genetic mutations?

Procedure

1. Give each student a copy of Master 4.11.

2. Read the scenario aloud and pose the following ethical question: Should an airline company be able to require perspective employees to have a genetic test for retinitis pigmentosa?

3. Remind students that the next step is to consider all relevant information. A great deal of information is available in Master 4.11.

4. Ask students, “Who or what will be affected by the decision?”

5. Ask students to identify the relevant ethical considerations.
   Students will likely identify ethical considerations such as minimizing harms and maximizing benefits, fairness, and respect for persons.

6. Now that students have identified the ethical considerations, help them elaborate on their initial ideas by asking questions such as these:

   a. What are the associated harms and benefits for airline companies that require retinitis pigmentosa genetic screening for perspective employees?
      Students will likely bring up economic benefits as part of this discussion.

   b. What are the associated harms and benefits for prospective employees who receive retinitis pigmentosa genetic screening from airline companies?
      Students may bring up
      • economic harms if these employees are not hired as a result of a positive test,
      • emotional harms if the prospective employee must now explain to family and friends why he or she was not hired, and
      • economic or emotional benefit if the prospective pilot can now choose a different career that he or she can do for a longer period of time.
c. How do the harms and benefits compare? Which outweighs the other? Why?

d. Should a company be able to require this kind of information from prospective employees? Why or why not?

   Note: By bringing up coercion, you can connect this to the ethical consideration of respect for persons.

e. If airlines refuse to hire someone with retinitis pigmentosa, is this unfair discrimination? Why or why not?

   Note: This links back to the ethical consideration of fairness.

f. Compare and contrast the current case with the following:

   Should an airline company be able to require prospective employees to have a routine vision test (including peripheral vision)? If prospective employees do not pass this test, the company plans to not hire them. Additionally, the company will conduct annual vision tests of all employees. Failure to pass means that the person’s contract will not be renewed.

   Note: In this case, the motivation is more about safety than economic benefit for the airline company.

   g. Should an airline company be able to require prospective employees to have a drug test for a substance such as marijuana? If the test comes back positive, the company plans not to hire or train the prospective pilot.