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Opening the psychological black box in genetic counseling

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Women from families in which many individuals have developed breast and/or ovarian cancer may request for DNA-testing. A DNA-test result may disclose their own risks to develop cancer (again), their relatives' risks and subsequent medical options. This thesis describes several nation-wide studies in the Netherlands about the psychological and medical impact of DNA-testing on the lives of these women and their relatives. Despite their general understanding of the DNA-test result, many participants interpreted the result differently from what the genetic-counselor had actually communicated. Like in a children's whisper game, their relatives also misinterpreted the information communicated by the first messenger. The messengers' misinterpretation was not only related to their rational ideas about heredity and cancer, but also to their unfulfilled need for certainty, sense of self and existential issues. Their misinterpretations predicted their distress and medical decisions after DNA-test result disclosure. The study results are described in their historical/theoretical context, followed by practical clinical suggestions for genetic-counselors and psychologists.

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Joël Vos

Opening the psychological black box in genetic counseling

A counselee-oriented, integrative approach on the impact of DNA-testing for breast and ovarian cancer on the lives of counselees

Joël Vos