

Researchers raise concerns over the increasing commercialization of science

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The increasing commercialisation of science is restricting access to vital scientific knowledge and delaying the progress of science, claim researchers in the British Medical Journal today.

Varuni de Silva and Raveen Hanwella from the University of Colombo in Sri Lanka argue that copyrighting or patenting medical scales, tests, techniques and genetic material, limits the level of public benefit from [scientific discovery](#).

For example, they found that many commonly used rating scales are under copyright and researchers have to pay for their use.

Some genetic tests also carry patents, which prevent other laboratories from doing the test for a lesser cost. Earlier this year, a New York court ruled that patents held by Myriad Genetics for the diagnosis of mutations in the BRCA1 and BRCA2 genes (linked to breast and [ovarian cancer](#)) were unconstitutional and invalid.

Extreme commercialisation of science can also lead to patents on medical procedures and techniques, say the authors. However, the American Medical Association recently concluded that it is unethical for physicians to seek, secure or enforce patents on medical procedures.

The scientific community is reacting to the increasing commercialisation of science, they add. For example, all genome sequences generated by the [human genome project](#) have been deposited into a public database

freely accessible by anyone, while organisations such as the National Institute of Health and Wellcome Trust insist on open access to publication resulting from research funded by them.

The fundamental philosophy of Western science is sharing knowledge and, while patenting is a useful tool for protecting investments in industry, "we need to rethink its role in science," they write.

They conclude: "Although those who consider science as a commodity are willing to invest in research and development, much medical research is still carried out by non-profit organisations using public money. It is only right that such knowledge is freely shared. This is possible because academic scientists still consider the prestige of discovery more important than monetary reward."

Provided by British Medical Journal

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