

European Patent on chimpanzees manipulated to develop cancer

Bionomics granted patent on human genes and genetically engineered great apes
Thursday, 8 August 2013
Munich

The European Patent Office (EPO) has again granted a patent that covers genetically engineered chimpanzees and other non-human primates. EP1364025 was granted on 31 July 2013 to Bionomics (Australia). The company claims human genes presumed to play a role in the prevention of cancer as an invention. According to the patent, the genes will be used to genetically manipulate the chimpanzees. As a result of the genetic manipulation, the great apes can have a higher risk of developing cancer. Bionomics already owns three other European Patents on chimpanzees suffering from diseases of the central nervous system.

“Bionomics has already filed more than a dozen patent applications to claim genetically engineered chimpanzees showing a broad range of diseases. We do not know of any other company that files so many of these controversial patents. It should be acknowledged that great apes exhibit evidence of consciousness akin to that of humans. Bionomics appears to be putting economic interests above all else”, Christoph Then says for Testbiotech. “Investors in Bionomics, including well known banking institutes, must ask themselves why no action is being taken to make sure ethical boundaries are respected.”

Bionomics is traded on the stock market in Australia. The Bionomics webpage names investors such as the HSBC Bank, UBS, JP Morgan, Citicorp and BNP Paribas.

Testbiotech is also very critical of the patent because it claims human genes that were simply isolated from the human body as an invention. The US Supreme Court recently stopped such patents because they concern pure discoveries. The European Patent Office (EPO) has received serious criticism from many politicians and civil society groups because the EPO is granting so-called patents on life. The EPO budget is based on payments from industry, however its decisions, cannot be forwarded to the European Court of Justice.

Recently Testbiotech, together with other organisations, filed oppositions against similar European patents filed by the US companies Altor and Intrexon. The oppositions have gained the support of more than 15.000 people. Meanwhile there are some first signs of success: Intrexon indicated that it might no longer uphold claims directed at great apes. However, the opposing organisations are requesting all claims directed at animals should be deleted from the patents held by Intrexon. Testbiotech now is considering taking action against the patent held by Bionomics.

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