

Discussion Questions for Workshop 6

Horizontal Gene Transfer:

- What is the mechanism of horizontal gene transfer (HGT)? Under what conditions does HGT occur?
- How serious of a threat is HGT? Should it be considered a significant biosafety issue?
- What precautions should be made when working with genetically modified organisms (GMOs)?

Gene Patenting:

- Should companies and individuals be allowed to patent human genes?
- Does patenting a gene differ from patenting another product or invention?
- How might gene patenting, or the lack thereof, affect synthetic biology and research in general?

HeLa Cells:

- If HeLa cells were originally obtained without permission, why are they still widely used by researchers nationwide?
- Do the many discoveries and treatments that have come out of work with HeLa cells justify their use?
- To what extent should genomic information be kept private? How do we compensate for family members with shared genetic material?