

**Michael Grade CBE Executive Chairman ITV
PLC
200 Gray's Inn Road
London WC1V8HF**

**Chairman
British Society for Human Genetics
c/o National Genetics Reference Laboratory and
Regional Molecular Genetics Service
St Mary's Hospital
Hathersage Road
Manchester M130JH**

12th November 2007

Dear Sir Michael,

ITV1 programme 'The killer within' broadcast on Thursday November 8th at 21.00

I am writing to make a formal complaint following the above broadcast under your procedure on the grounds that the programme failed to meet the broadcasting standards expected by the public and in contradiction to your Corporate Responsibility report of 2006 (page 11 Impartiality). This complaint is lodged in response to concerns expressed to me by many members of the British Society for Human Genetics. The BSHG is lodging a separate complaint with OFCOM under its procedure. The Society represents researchers and the scientists, doctors and counselors who develop and provide NHS services for individuals and families at risk of inherited disease.

The programme followed four celebrity clients of a UK company called Genetic Health through a genetic screening test. The programme showed the process leading up to the test decision including a discussion of their family history of conditions such as Alzheimer's disease and prostate cancer and summarised the results of the test by showing the test result counselling session.

The programme portrayed these genetic tests as useful predictors of future ill health without any discussion around the scientific basis of the testing offered. Analysis of common genetic variants to predict disease susceptibility may have some potential but most scientists and doctors who have expertise in this field would agree that the scientific evidence is currently preliminary and the performance of this type of test in health risk discrimination is unsubstantiated and unvalidated. In summary the programme amounted to undeclared advertising for the company without sufficient detail or discussion to allow that audience to properly weight the content.

A great deal of effort has been made in the UK to engage the public in a debate on the issues surrounding genetics and human health. The BSHG is concerned that the uncritical journalistic and broadcasting standards demonstrated in this programme risk undermining the confidence of the public in the application of genetics which has great potential to improve healthcare.

There was undoubtedly a public service programme to be made to discuss the current status of the science behind the test offered. This could have been presented in the context of the framework of regulation, guidance and professional good practice. The programme could have shown the balance between the benefits of health advice against the potential harm following assurances given to the clients that they were at low risk of particular health conditions.

I look forward to your reply

Yours Sincerely

Dr Rob Elles (Chairman British Society for Human Genetics)

Copies: CEO OFCOM, Chairman Human Genetics Commission, Genetics Unit Department of Health