Remarks of Alan Mertz

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Good morning. I want to welcome all of you to a program that I think you are going to find eye-opening and different. And, by the way, perhaps a welcome change from 24/7 news about the election—or, for that matter, the economy.

We have quite a challenge. Not only is genetic testing infinitely complex, it is one of the least understood aspects of health care. Yet, it is arguably becoming one of the most important advances in the history of health care.

The misconceptions around genetics abound. If Americans were to rely solely on *popular culture* to acquire their knowledge about it, they would think that the purpose of genetic testing is to help CSI labs catch criminals. Those who acquire their knowledge from major media stories might see these tests as "unproven, unnecessary, and unregulated."

The reality is that there is much, much more to the story. And it is critical that those facts come out. Because a full and accurate understanding of genetic testing and its true impact is essential if policymakers are to knowledgeably address the policy questions that lie ahead—and here, I am thinking of everything from future regulation to future reimbursement, along with privacy, validation, and all the other issues that come up along the way.

That is why today's session is so critical.

We have brought together experts with extensive knowledge and real world expertise to talk about what genetic testing means today…. for patients today—as well as the future. As one of our panelists put it, this primer is aimed at separating the 'wheat from the chaff' And, there is a lot of wheat.

- How many people understand that genetic tests are the primary reason that people are no longer dying from HIV? And that it's now a chronic disease?

- How many people understand that genetic tests are the reason that the survival rate for the most common form of childhood leukemia is now more than 80% versus 4% in the 1960s?

- How many people understand that genetic tests are the reason that we know which patients will benefit from a genomics-based breast cancer drug that reduces the risk of death by 33% and the risk of recurrence by 52%?

- And….How many people understand that genetic tests are one of the primary hopes for turning around – in the not too distant future-- some of the most dangerous diseases we face, such as lung cancer, ovarian cancer, even heart disease?

To be sure, there is also chaff. There are legitimate questions and concerns …as there have been with virtually all major advances in medicine over the last 100 years.

We must <u>deal</u> with those important questions….but we must <u>deal with them</u> from a sound and accurate understanding of what genetic testing is and what it does.

Before we get started, let me spend just a minute introducing you to the group that planned the event – the Results for Life campaign. Results for Life is a separate non-

profit organization with the sole purpose of communicating that clinical lab tests can help reduce health care costs through prevention, early detection, and management of disease. Please look over the informational brochure provided at the table and visit the Results for Life web site.

Our discussion will be guided by one of the best journalists on the topic of health policy and health legislation, John Iglehart. You know him largely as the founding editor of *Health Affairs*, but John is also the Washington correspondent for the *New England Journal of Medicine*, and continues to report on today's hottest issues. With out further ado, John, the microphone is yours…