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Decoding genes to prevent heart attacks

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Geneticist Sekar Kathiresan says genomic studies can help screen people who are at risk from cardiac disease. THE HINDU

Genomic studies on the population can help the scientific and medical community fully understand heart disease biologically. geneticist Sekar Kathiresan

The absence of genomic studies is hindering the progress of preventive cardiology in India, says Sekar Kathiresan, a physician scientist and human geneticist. He is the Director of Preventive Cardiology and Associate Professor of Medicine at Harvard Medical School.

He says genomic studies on the population can help the scientific and medical community fully understand heart disease biologically.

Will help screening those at risk

“It would help in screening people who are at risk from the disease and taking preventive measures,” he says. The rules banning the genomic studies are the obstacles, he adds.

He was in the city to attend the 2016 NextGen Genomics, Biology, Bioinformatics and

Technologies (NGBT) conference. He presented his findings on how certain genes and lifestyle add to the risk or protect an individual from the risk factors that could lead to heart attacks.

He says his genomic studies on protective gene mutations had led to drug development in the U.S.

He says the drugs only mimic the function of protective genes and they do not affect the genes of the individual.

Though he started working on the project in 1997, it was only after the human genome sequence was completed in 2003 that his studies gathered pace.

He found that while in some individuals risks were because of a single gene, it was polygenic in others.

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