



Unveiling the Mystery Behind Generational Family Deaths

Description

Susan Weiss Liebman dedicated years to uncovering a subtle genetic mutation within her family's DNA, responsible for a history of sudden, inexplicable deaths. Her journey, recounted in her book, *The Dressmaker's Mirror*, began with her niece Karen's unexpected death due to dilated cardiomyopathy (DCM) in 2008.

Karen, healthy and pregnant, collapsed unexpectedly, mirroring the long-term illness of her mother, Diane. Initially misattributed to a viral infection, it was later revealed the condition was genetic, a lethal gene passed from mother to daughter. This revelation spurred Dr. Liebman, a geneticist, to delve deeply into her family's medical past.

Her research unveiled a gene mutation affecting a crucial protein for heart muscle structure and function, which many family members had inherited, including her father, grandmother, and young uncle Eugene. His death in 1916, long believed to be an accident, was actually due to heart failure—a realization that helped piece together the family's tragic hereditary puzzle.

In collaboration with geneticists, including Dr. Beth McNally at Northwestern University, Dr. Liebman traced the mutation predominantly in Ashkenazi Jews—a community with heightened risk due to shared ancestry from a small population. Over time, the mutation became widespread, affecting countless descendants.

Eventually, Dr. Liebman informed her relatives, providing crucial insights and encouraging genetic testing to mitigate future risks. This newfound understanding transformed the family's outlook, proving that while DCM can be fatal, it is manageable with vigilant care.

Dr. Liebman's introspective journey underscores the power of genetic knowledge, reshaping her family's legacy from one of unrelenting grief to one of hope and preventative action, turning a family curse into a manageable condition.

Vocabulary List:

1. **Mutation** /mju:'teɪʃən/ (noun): A change in a DNA sequence that can lead to genetic variation.
2. **Inexplicable** /,ɪn.ɪk'splɪk.ə.bəl/ (adjective): Unable to be explained or accounted for.
3. **Lethal** /'li:.θəl/ (adjective): Sufficient to cause death.
4. **Vigilant** /'vɪdʒ.ɪ.lənt/ (adjective): Keeping careful watch for possible danger or difficulties.
5. **Hereditary** /hə'red.ɪ.tər.i/ (adjective): Passed down from one generation to the next through genetic inheritance.
6. **Ancestry** /'æn.ses.tri/ (noun): One's family or ethnic descent.



Answer

CATEGORY

1. Health - LEVEL4

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