Ethics on Demand – Whistle Blowing

**Article:** [Heredity or hoax?](https://newsinteractives.cbc.ca/longform/dna-ancestry-test)

**What was the situation?**

Louis Côté was suspicious of Viaguard Accu-Metrics kits that test human DNA to determine ancestry. He decided to try an experiment by submitting a sample from himself and a dog. The test results were identical., Both Côté and Snoopy (the dog) had 20 per cent Native American ancestry. Côté provided the results to CBC News, a whistle blowing action after solution-seeking attempts failed. To further investigate, CBC News ordered the same DNA kits as well as a kit from a second company. Swabs were obtained from three newsroom employees (no known Indigenous ancestry). Viaguard sent back results indicating all three CBC employees had 20 per cent Native American DNA, replicating the same detailed breakdown as Côté. The second testing company found none of the CBC employees were of Native American origin. Harvey Tenenbaum, Viaguard’s owner and research director, declined repeated requests from CBC News for an interview.

**What went wrong?**

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| Lack of professional  responsibility to report | Disregard of safe practices | Lack of client protection |

**Using the Code of Ethics**

The [CSMLS Code of Ethics](https://www.csmls.org/About-Us/Our-Members/Code-of-Ethics.aspx) serves to define and expand the inherent ethical concepts contained in the [CSMLS Code of Professional Conduct](https://www.csmls.org/About-Us/Our-Members/Code-of-Conduct.aspx), to document expectations of ethical behaviour for all medical laboratory professionals, and to provide a framework during professional and personal self-evaluation. Consider how adhering to these codes could have prevented the situation. What other codes are applicable?

*Code of Ethics*

* 1.4 Utilize professional and institutional mechanisms to intervene when witness to unsafe, incompetent or unethical practices.
* 1.5 Assume responsibility for errors one has committed or observed and take immediate action to prevent or minimize associated harm.
* 4.1 Be responsible first to the patient, then to society and the environment for safe and lawful practice and the sustainable use of resources.

*Code of Professional Conduct*

* Medical laboratory professionals shall take responsibility for their professional acts.
* Medical laboratory professionals shall practise safe work procedures at all times to ensure the safety of patients and co-workers and the protection of the environment.

**Resource**

[CSMLS Position Statement – Whistleblower](https://csmls.org/csmls/media/documents/position_statements/WhistleBlowerEN.pdf)