In the last decade, ‘personalization’ has become a major feature of contemporary biomedicine. Many actors from industry, science and government imagine that the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of disease will become increasingly customized or tailored to the individual. While investments by industry and government in the promise of genomics has largely shaped how we think about what counts as personalized medicine today, I take a historical perspective to examine how ideas of ‘personalized medicine’ have changed in the history of western medicine, its material practices and its own ‘past futures’. I conclude that from this analysis of the past, we can begin to think of alternative ways of imagining the ‘personalization’ of medicine.

Dr Richard Tutton is Senior Lecturer in the Department of Sociology at Lancaster University and Assistant Director of the ESRC Centre for Economic and Social Aspects of Genomics (Cesagen). His work is located at the intersection of medical sociology and science and technology studies. Building on his previous research on changing subjectivity, citizenship, and discourses of race/ethnicity in the contexts of biomedicine and genomics, he is currently working on a monograph on how ‘personalization’ has come to be a powerful yet also contested vision of the future of health and medicine in the twenty-first century.