



## **Institutional-Based Model Credentialing Policy for Genetic Counselors**

National Society of Genetic Counselors

### **Background**

Genetic counseling is the process of helping people understand and adapt to the medical, psychological and familial implications of genetic contributions to disease. This process integrates:

- Interpretation of family and medical histories to assess the chance of disease occurrence or recurrence.
- Education about inheritance, testing, management, prevention, resources and research.
- Counseling to promote informed choices and adaptation to the risk or condition

Genetic counselors are health professionals with specialized graduate degrees and experience in the areas of medical genetics and counseling. Most enter the field from a variety of disciplines, including biology, genetics, nursing, psychology, public health, and social work.

Genetic counselors work as members of a healthcare team, providing information and support to families who have members with birth defects or genetic disorders and to families who may be at risk for a variety of inherited conditions. They identify families at risk, investigate the problem present in the family, interpret information about the disorder, analyze inheritance patterns and risks of recurrence and review available options with the family.

Genetic counselors also provide supportive counseling to families, serve as patient advocates, and refer individuals and families to community or state support services. They serve as educators and resource people for other healthcare professionals and for the general public. Some counselors also work in administrative capacities. Many engage in research activities related to the field of medical genetics and genetic counseling.

Genetic counselors are integral members of healthcare teams in a variety of settings, locations, and specialties including university medical centers, private and public hospitals/medical facilities, diagnostic laboratories, pharmaceutical companies, not-for-

profit organizations, and government organizations and agencies. They provide essential services in multiple specialty areas, including prenatal; cardiovascular disease; cancer; metabolic disease; neurology; pediatrics; infertility; pharmacogenetics; and genomic medicine. Many different specialist physicians refer their patients to genetic counselors including obstetrician/gynecologists, primary care physicians, oncologists, gastroenterologists, neurologists, cardiologists, ophthalmologists, and pulmonologists.

## **Credentialing Genetic Counselors**

Credentialing should demonstrate a proficient level of knowledge and competence as a genetic counselor. NSGC recommends verification of the following minimum credentials:

- **Education and Training**

Master's degree in Genetic Counseling from a program accredited by the Accreditation Council for Genetic Counseling (ACGC). Verification of training specific to the scope of services to be provided should be supplied by the program director. A list of accredited programs is available at <http://qceducation.org/Pages/Accredited-Programs.aspx>.

- **Certification**

The American Board of Genetic Counseling (ABGC) certifies genetic counselors and accredits genetic counseling training programs. The Certified Genetic Counselor (CGC<sup>®</sup>) credential is the benchmark credential in the genetic counseling profession. ABGC does not recognize the term "Board Eligible." Genetic counselors who wish to take the certification examination apply for Active Candidate Status and must take and pass the examination within the approved examination cycle to achieve certification. If they do not achieve certification in the applied-for exam cycle, they must apply as new applicants for a future exam. For further information, and to verify whether board certification for genetic counselors, visit the ABGC website: <http://www.abgc.net>.

- **Licensure**

State licensure should be verified with the state licensure board. A list of states that currently license genetic counselors and links to state licensing rules and regulations is available at <http://nsgc.org/p/cm/ld/fid=19>. When determining privileges to be granted to genetic counselors, the scope of practice identified in the rules and regulations for the individual state should be taken into consideration.

- **Competency**

For new applicants, verification of training specific to the scope of services to be provided should be supplied by the program director. For genetic counselors in current practice, current competency should also be documented by other members of the healthcare team at the institution where the applicant currently practices (or most recently practiced) who have direct knowledge of the clinical skills of the genetic counselor. This would include the department chair, service chief, chief of staff, or supervising/collaborating physician. Peer recommendations should be obtained from other genetic counselors. The new applicant genetic counselor should document the approximate number of patients/families to which he/she provided genetic counseling services in the past 12 months.

For reappointment/recredentialing, the genetic counselor should document compliance with all maintenance of certification requirements of the American Board of Genetic Counseling, continuation of unrestricted state licensure, and completion the minimum number of continuing education hours required by ABGC and state regulations. Evaluation of collaborating/supervising physician should be incorporated into the ongoing professional practice evaluation and recredentialing processes. (See sample Quality Assessment/Focused and Ongoing Professional Practice Evaluation Form.)

### **NSGC Genetic Counselor Scope of Practice:**

The following scope of practice for genetic counselors was developed by the NSGC. Service delivery models may include providing services in-person, via telephone, via group counseling, and through telegenetics.

- a) Obtain and evaluate individual, family, and medical histories to determine genetic risk for genetic/medical conditions and diseases in a patient, his/her offspring, and other family members;
- b) Discuss the features, natural history, means of diagnosis, genetic and environmental factors, and management of risk for genetic/medical conditions and diseases;
- c) Identify and coordinate genetic laboratory tests and other diagnostic studies as appropriate for the genetic assessment;
- d) Integrate genetic laboratory test results and other diagnostic studies with personal and family medical history to assess and communicate risk factors for genetic/medical conditions and diseases;
- e) Explain the clinical implications of genetic laboratory tests and other diagnostic studies and their results;
- f) Evaluate the client's or family's responses to the condition or risk of recurrence and provide client-centered counseling and anticipatory guidance;
- g) Identify and utilize community resources that provide medical, educational, financial, and psychosocial support and advocacy; and
- h) Provide written documentation of medical, genetic, and counseling information for families and health care professionals.

### **Quality Assessment/Focused and Ongoing Professional Practice Evaluation**

The Accreditation Council for Genetic Counseling published Practice-Based Competencies for Genetic Counselors. The following form, which was developed based on these competencies, can be utilized to perform an assessment of practicing genetic counselors as part of the institution's quality assessment/performance improvement or ongoing professional practice evaluation processes.

## Quality Assessment/Focused and Ongoing Professional Practice Evaluation Form

Competency	Meets Expectations	Does not Meet Expectations
<b>Genetics Expertise and Analysis</b>		
Demonstrate and utilize a depth and breadth of understanding and knowledge of genetics and genomics core concepts and principles.		
Integrate knowledge of psychosocial aspects of conditions with a genetic component to promote client well-being.		
Construct relevant, targeted and comprehensive personal and family histories and pedigrees		
Identify, assess, facilitate, and integrate genetic testing options in genetic counseling practice		
Assess individuals' and their relatives' probability of conditions with a genetic component or carrier status based on their pedigree, test result(s), and other pertinent information		
Demonstrate the skills necessary to successfully manage a genetic counseling case		
Critically assess genetic/genomic, medical and social science literature and information		
<b>Interpersonal, Psychosocial and Counseling Skills</b>		
Establish a mutually agreed upon genetic counseling agenda with the client		
Employ active listening and interviewing skills to identify, assess, and empathically respond to stated and emerging concerns		
Use a range of genetic counseling skills and models to facilitate informed decision-making and adaptation to genetic risks or conditions		
Promote client-centered, informed, non-coercive and value-based decision-making		
Understand how to adapt genetic counseling skills for varied service delivery models		
Apply genetic counseling skills in a culturally responsive and respectful manner to all clients		
<b>Education</b>		
Effectively educate clients about a wide range of genetics and genomics information based on their needs, their characteristics and the circumstances of the encounter		
Write concise and understandable clinical and scientific information for audiences of varying educational backgrounds		
Effectively give a presentation on genetics, genomics and genetic counseling issues.		
<b>Professional Development &amp; Practice</b>		
Act in accordance with the ethical, legal and philosophical principles and values of the genetic counseling profession and the policies of one's institution or organization		
Demonstrate understanding of the research process		
Advocate for individuals, families, communities and the genetic counseling profession		
Demonstrate a self-reflective, evidenced-based and current approach to genetic counseling practice		
Understand the methods, roles and responsibilities of the process of clinical supervision of trainees.		
Establish and maintain professional interdisciplinary relationships in both team and one-on-one settings, and recognize one's role in the larger healthcare system		

## **Positions of Other Societies**

The following positions have been rendered by other organization regarding the genetic counselor.

### **American College of Medical Genetics**

Genetic counselors are members of the medical genetics team that is led by a clinical medical geneticist or other physicians. They are involved in development, documentation and assessment of family histories, facilitation of genetic testing decision-making, patient/family education, and they address the psychosocial needs of their patients. Genetic counselors also operate in a growing list of subspecialty genetic services including prenatal, pediatric, cancer and psychiatric (or neuro) genetics. These genetic counselors may be independent of the direct medical genetics team and are directed by the physicians in the respective areas.

*Source: Medical Genetics Scope of Practice; American College of Medical Genetics*

### **College of American Pathologists Position:**

The College of American Pathologists (CAP) believes that genetic counselors can perform a vital role in counseling clients on the advisability or results of genetic tests, provided such counseling does not involve a medical diagnosis.

*Source: CAP Issue Brief: Scope of Practice – Genetic Counselors*