

Genetic Counselor

Genetic counselors are specialized health care professionals who work at the crossroads of medicine, technology, and bioethics. They facilitate the translation of genetic discoveries to everyday medical care by working with individuals and families seeking information about medical conditions that have a genetic contribution.

Career Description

As health care professionals, genetic counselors interpret and provide clear and comprehensive information about the risk of any medical condition that may have a genetic contribution. This involves collecting and interpreting family, medical, and psychosocial history information. Analysis of this history information together with an understanding of genetic principles and the knowledge of current technologies provide individuals and their families with information about risk, prognosis, medical management, and diagnostic and prevention options. Genetic counselors facilitate an informed decision-making process that elicits and respects the spectrum of personal beliefs and values that exist in society.

Employment Characteristics

Genetic counselors practice as part of a health care team. The settings in which genetic counselors work include hospitals and medical centers, public health agencies, colleges and universities, diagnostic laboratories, biotechnology companies, research institutions, private practice, and governmental agencies.

According to the 2010 Professional Status Survey (PSS), conducted by the National Society of Genetic Counselors (NSGC), 33 percent of all genetic counselors work in university medical centers, 19 percent in private hospitals/medical facilities, and 14 percent in public hospitals/medical facilities.

Prenatal, cancer, and pediatric are the most common specialty areas in which genetic counselors work, according to the PSS. Examples of other specialty areas include adult, neurogenetics, psychiatry, cardiology, infertility, laboratory testing/ screening, and disease-specific clinics.

In addition to health care, advances made by the Human Genome Project have relevance in many other areas. As a result, genetic counselors have expanded and adapted their skills into areas such as research, industry, education, policy, public health, administration, and advocacy work.

Salary

According to the 2010 PSS, the average salary for clinical genetic counselors reported by survey respondents was \$63,700 but ranged up to \$150,000. Salaries vary by location ([www.nsgc.org/Portals/0/Publications/PSS 2010 Executive Summary FINAL.pdf](http://www.nsgc.org/Portals/0/Publications/PSS%2010%20Executive%20Summary%20FINAL.pdf)).

For more information, refer to www.ama-assn.org/go/hpsalary.

Educational Programs

Length. Genetic counselors have a master's degree from a graduate program specifically designed to prepare individuals for a career as a genetic counselor. The training is specialized and includes coursework and hands-on supervised clinical experiences.

Curriculum. The coursework includes instruction in the following general content areas:

- Human, medical, and clinical genetics
- Psychosocial theory and techniques
- Social, ethical, and legal issues
- Health care delivery systems and public health principles
- Teaching techniques
- Research methods

The supervised clinical experiences provide students with diversified clinical training and give them experience working with individuals and families affected with a broad range of genetic disorders and counseling situations. This clinical training is important in exposing students to the natural history and management of and psychosocial issues associated with common genetic conditions and birth defects. Students also obtain experience in teaching, laboratory methods, and research.

The American Board of Genetic Counseling accredits graduate programs in genetic counseling.

Inquiries

Careers

Meghan Carey, Executive Director
National Society of Genetic Counselors
401 North Michigan Avenue
Chicago, IL 60611
(312) 321-6834
E-mail: nsgc@nsgc.org
www.nsgc.org

Credentialing/ Program Accreditation

Sheila O'Neal, Executive Director
American Board of Genetic Counseling

18000 West 105th Street
Olathe, KS 66061
(913) 895-4617
E-mail: info@abgc.net
www.abgc.net