

# National Society of Genetic Counselors



## Who Are Genetic Counselors?

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

Genetic counselors work with other members of the healthcare team to provide information and support to individuals and families concerned with genetic disorders, individuals who may be at risk for a variety of inherited conditions, or patients seeking genomic evaluation services. Their primary role is to procure and interpret family and medical histories; identify at-risk individuals; explain genetics inheritance and natural history, quantify chance of occurrence and recurrence; review available testing options; and facilitate decision-making regarding prevention and management.

Genetic counselors work in clinical environments (hospitals, medical practices, universities, health maintenance organizations, and private practices), in corporations (pharmaceutical firms and genetic testing companies), and as consultants to medical practices, public health departments, and healthcare companies. They are educators and serve as resources for other healthcare professionals, as well as the public. Many engage in research activities related to the field of medical genetics and genetic counseling.

According to NSGC's 2018 Professional Status Survey, the primary practice areas of NSGC members are: Oncology, Pediatrics, and General Genetics (e.g. Adult disease, Neurogenetics, and Cardiology).

## How Are Genetic Counselors Certified?

The [American Board of Genetic Counseling](#) (ABGC) certifies genetic counselors and the Accreditation Council for Genetic Counseling (ACGC) accredits genetic counseling training programs.

The profession has skyrocketed, with the number of Certified Genetic Counselors (CGC) rising from 495 in 1993 to almost 5,000 today. NSGC expects the profession to grow by 100 percent over the next decade, making it one of the fastest-growing professions in the United States. There are currently 41 accredited graduate programs in the United States with another four under development.

ABGC certification establishes the credentials that individual practitioners must have to provide competent genetic counseling services. ABGC Diplomates must graduate from at least a master's-level ACGC-accredited genetic counseling graduate program and document clinical experience that represents a wide variety of genetic counseling roles and clinical practice. Genetic counselors must also successfully complete an exam administered by the National Board of Medical Examiners. ABGC requires genetic counselors to be recertified every five years by reexamination or by completing continuing education courses (25 hours/year).

ABGC credentials are recognized as the gold standard in the healthcare industry and through its thorough accreditation and credentialing processes, ensures the highest level of competency and professionalism in the field. ABGC may, at its discretion, deny, suspend, or revoke eligibility, certification, recertification, or

proficiency recognition of a Diplomate, if the individual is the subject of documented evidence of gross incompetence or unethical conduct.

Twenty-five states license genetic counselors as independent practitioners using ABGC certification as the core requirement. Genetic counselors in the other twenty-five states are in process of achieving licensure.

### **Who Sees a Genetic Counselor?**

Individuals and their family members who are concerned about the risks of either passing on or developing inherited diseases use genetic counselors. In the era of personalized medicine, genetic counselors work as part of the healthcare team to facilitate and interpret genomic evaluation for non-hereditary conditions.

Advancements in genetic technology have made it possible to identify genetic factors that predispose or increase an individual's risk of developing a variety of adult-onset illnesses, such as cancer, Alzheimer's disease, cardiovascular disease, and other common conditions.

### **Why Access Genetic Counseling Services?**

Genetic counselors help patients understand the complexities of genetic information and help them make medical decisions based on their genetic risks or disorders. They also help patients make informed decisions regarding genetic testing that are consistent with their religion, culture, and personal beliefs. Genetic counselors encourage compliance with published medical management guidelines and they ensure the appropriate use of genetic tests