

Cancer Genetic Counselors Enhance Your Practice

Growing consumer awareness is likely increasing the number of questions your patients are asking about their risk of cancer and the availability of genetic testing. How does the busy clinician address these questions? **Genetic counselors are here to help.**

The primary goal of cancer genetic counseling is to identify individuals and families at increased risk of cancer for the purpose of promoting awareness, early detection and cancer prevention. Genetic counselors are uniquely qualified to increase efficiency in your practice by dealing with both technical and emotional aspects related to increased cancer risk.

Genetic counselors are health professionals with specialized graduate degrees and experience in the areas of medical genetics and counseling.

For more information about cancer genetics, cancer genetic counseling, or for referral resources in your area, visit the NSGC website at:

<http://www.nsgc.org/providers/cancer/index.cfm>

Or contact the National Society of Genetic Counselors at :

Email nsgc@nsgc.org

Phone 312.321.6834

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Cancer Genetic Counselors

*Working Hand-In-Hand
with Physicians to
Educate and Care for
Patients*



National Society of
Genetic Counselors

Which patients may benefit from genetic counseling?

- *Individuals with a personal and/or family history suspicious of hereditary cancer susceptibility (see “Red Flags of Hereditary Cancer Susceptibility” for specific examples)*
- *Members of a family with a known cancer susceptibility syndrome*
- *Individuals with extreme cancer anxiety, even in the absence of heightened risk*



- *Individuals considering cancer genetic testing*
- *Individuals with questions about cancer risk in offspring or extended family members*
- *High risk individuals, including those with a known cancer susceptibility syndrome, with questions about cancer treatment, prevention and/or screening options*
- *Individuals who have undergone genetic testing through their physician and would like a more detailed discussion about their test results*

Common Components of Cancer Genetic Counseling

Genetic counselors are specially trained health-care professionals with skills in medical genetics and counseling who work in a variety of settings including cancer genetic risk assessment. Genetic counseling for patients concerned about their cancer risk includes the following:

- *Collecting a detailed cancer-focused personal and family medical history*
- *Assessing a person’s risk of developing cancer based on this information*
- *Determining whether the history is suggestive of an inherited cancer syndrome*
- *Providing patient education and answering questions about cancer risks, the option of genetic testing, and the risks and benefits of genetic testing*
- *Reviewing medical management options with or without genetic testing*
- *Providing psychosocial support to and facilitating communication between patients and families*
- *Communicating back to primary care/referring physicians so that the information from the risk assessment can be used to appropriately manage cancer risk*

Red Flags of Hereditary Cancer Susceptibility

- 🚩 *Cancer diagnosed at an unusually young age (e.g., breast or colon cancer before age 50)*
- 🚩 *Multiple close family members with either the same type of cancer or related cancers (e.g., breast and ovarian cancer; colon and uterine cancer)*
- 🚩 *Two or more primary cancer diagnoses in the same individual (e.g., breast cancer in both breasts, ovarian and breast cancer, colon and uterine cancer)*
- 🚩 *Certain rare cancers or tumors (e.g., medullary thyroid cancer; retinoblastoma; hepatoblastoma; male breast cancer; adrenocortical carcinoma; pheochromocytoma)*
- 🚩 *Other features associated with a hereditary cancer syndrome (e.g., multiple colon polyps)*

Hallmarks of Hereditary Cancer Families include multiple affected family members in successive generations, early age of onset, rare tumors, and multiple primary cancers. In some families, a pattern of cancer is obvious; in others, small family size, incomplete family history or inability to document diagnoses make it more difficult to detect a pattern. The underlying molecular cause has been identified for a number of hereditary cancer syndromes. Genetic counseling with or without genetic testing may be indicated for selected patients.