

Further Information

The AGNC website includes details of:

- Career Structure
- Courses and conferences
- Registration
- Vacancies
- Useful websites

www.agnc.org.uk

Registration

Details of the registration process and eligibility are available at www.gcrb.co.uk

MSc Courses

Further information on the MSc courses is available from the following web sites:

Manchester

<http://www.medicine.manchester.ac.uk/postgraduate/taught/geneticcounselling>

Cardiff

<http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/medic/aboutus/departments/medicalgenetics/teaching/mscgeneticcounselling/>

Leaflet produced by the AGNC and GCRB

A Career as a Genetic Counsellor



Association of
Genetic Nurses
and Counsellors

What is Genetic Counselling?

Genetic counselling is defined as 'a communication process which deals with human problems associated with the occurrence, or the risk of occurrence, of a genetic disorder in a family' (American Society of Human Genetics, 1975).

The aims of genetic counselling are to help the individual or family:

- understand the information about the genetic condition
- appreciate the inheritance pattern and risk of recurrence
- understand the options available
- make decisions appropriate to their personal and family situation
- make the best possible adjustment to the disorder or risk.

The aim is to help people to gain sufficient understanding of their situation so that they can make informed decisions about what they wish to do.

Career Prospects

In March 2004 a career structure for Genetic counsellors was formally adopted by the AGNC. Further details are available on the AGNC web site.

Salaries

Salaries are designated by the employer, as regulated by Agenda for Change.

The role of the AGNC

The Association of Genetic Nurses and Counsellors is an organisation representing Genetic Counsellors, Nurses and other non-medical staff working within Clinical Genetics.

The aims of the association include:

- to provide support for professionals working in the field
- to provide forums for education and scientific meetings
- to represent the views of the profession
- to prescribe good standards of clinical practice
- to liaise and collaborate with other clinical and scientific colleagues in the field
- to provide channels of communication within the profession

Genetic Counsellor Registration

In the near future, the title Genetic Counsellor will be protected in the UK and may only be used by those who have registered with the Genetic Counselling Registration Board (GCRB). The GCRB is the administrative body which ensures standardised education and training for genetic counsellors, as well as assessment of applicants seeking to be admitted to the register.

Practitioners coming from either route will need 2 years experience in a regional genetics centre (typically as a trainee genetic counsellor) before they can submit a portfolio to the GCRB for registration. They will be expected to have completed a broad spectrum of genetic counselling experience. Details of the registration process and eligibility are available at www.gcrb.co.uk

If you are in doubt about whether you have the requisite background or experience, or whether the course you intend to do is suitable to prepare you to register as a genetic counsellor, you are welcome to contact the GCRB or the AGNC.

What does a Genetic Counsellor do?

A genetic counsellor is a health professional who generally works as a part of a team to deliver genetic counselling to individuals and families.

The work is varied and may involve working with people of any age. Here are some examples of the type of situations in which a referral for genetic counselling may be made:

- A child is born with several abnormalities
- A family history of a genetic disorder
- A family history of cancer
- A diagnosis of an adult onset neurodegenerative disease
- Genetic management of a high-risk pregnancy
- Genetic testing of an adolescent for carrier status

As the work undertaken by Genetic counsellors is confidential, it is not possible to shadow an individual doing clinical work. It may be possible to meet a counsellor face to face to discuss the general scope of their work, but this would need to be by individual agreement through contacting your local genetics service. Details of these can be found on the BSHG website (www.bshg.org.uk).

Where do Genetic Counsellors work?

The majority of genetic counsellors work in National Health Service (NHS) Trusts with links to a Regional Genetics Centre. Many are based in a Clinical Genetics Department and in this context work in close association with doctors trained in medical genetics. Increasingly, genetic counsellors may be employed in specialist units, such as cancer centres.

Some genetic counsellor roles are restricted to either adult or paediatric services, but for most the work will involve contact with individuals across the lifespan. It is possible to work generically, seeing families with a wide range of genetic conditions, or to specialise in a particular area of interest. Genetic counsellors may see clients in both a clinical setting (hospital or clinic) and in the community, which may involve home visiting.

Genetic counsellors are also employed in other settings. They may be involved in research, for example studies addressing the psychosocial issues of genetic conditions or genetic counselling. In the United Kingdom, some genetic counsellors are employed by lay support groups or organisations such as the Genetic Interest Group or the Huntington's Disease Association. Others work as academics, for example, teaching genetics to health or social care professionals.

How do you become a genetic counsellor?

Historically, Genetic Counsellors entered the profession from a variety of backgrounds. Whilst a diversity of backgrounds still exists, there are now only two entry routes to become a Registered Genetic Counsellor in the United Kingdom.

If you are a graduate nurse or midwife with two years post-registration experience and have completed counselling skills training of at least 90 hours duration you may be eligible to apply directly for posts to become a trainee genetic counsellor. Additional education or experience in the field of human genetics is also desirable. To obtain a certificate of eligibility to apply for posts, please see www.gcrb.co.uk. *As a trainee genetic counsellor, practitioners would be expected to undertake at least 30 hours of training in human genetics.*

If you are a graduate of a discipline related to clinical genetics, such as genetics, biology, psychology or sociology, then you could apply to do an MSc in Genetic Counselling. When selecting students for such courses, selectors will usually require evidence of experience of caring work, either paid or voluntary. At present, there are two MSc Genetic Counselling courses in the UK ([University of Manchester](#) and [Cardiff University](#)), which are approved by the GCRB. Individuals who graduate from either of these MSc courses can apply for posts to become a trainee genetic counsellor and will be eligible to register as a genetic counsellor in the UK.