

Northwest Gynecological Oncology

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GENETIC COUNSELING

What is Genetic Counseling?

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 the following:

- 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 adaptations to the risk or condition.

What is a Genetic Counselor?

A genetic counselor is a health care professional who is academically and clinically prepared to provide genetic counseling services to individuals and families seeking information about the occurrence, or risk of occurrence, of a genetic condition or birth defect.

Genetic counselors practice as part of a health care team. They interpret and provide clear and comprehensive information about the risk of any medical condition that may have a genetic contribution. They ascertain the usefulness of genetic technologies for individual families and facilitate an informed decision-making process that elicits and respects the spectrum of personal beliefs and values that exist in society.

Certification by ABGC is indicated by the acronym CGC® and ensures that an individual is qualified to provide genetic counseling services. The certification process includes verification of specialized training, documentation of clinical experiences and successfully passing both a comprehensive general genetics and genetic counseling examination.

All ABGC certified genetic counselors have at least a master's degree. Their education involves graduate coursework in:

- 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
- Clinical training, working with individuals and families affected with a broad range of genetic conditions.

Why See a Genetic Counselor?

Individuals and families seek genetic counseling services at various times and for different reasons. Some examples are:

- Before or during pregnancy to discuss factors that might increase the chance for having a child with a birth defect or genetic condition. Some of these factors include the mother's age, a history of pregnancy losses, a family history of a genetic condition and the ethnic background of the family
- During childhood to help better understand the reason a child has a birth defect, developmental problem, poor growth or recognized genetic condition
- During adulthood to discuss the likelihood for developing conditions that are hereditary and typically occur later in life. Some examples include cancer, heart disease and mental illness. Often recommendations can be made that target prevention.

Generally, our physicians will recommend a referral for genetic counseling, if appropriate. Individuals and families also may call directly for an appointment. If you have questions about whether genetic counseling is for you, please call our office.