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FACTS ABOUT THE GENETIC COUNSELING PROFESSION

Did you know...?

• Genetic Counselor was named a “Hot Concentration” for a future job in healthcare in a 2014 article published by U.S. News and World Report. The article notes that the Bureau of Labor Statistics projects above-average growth for genetic counseling positions over the years 2012 - 2022.

• Genetic counselors work in a variety of settings, including university medical centers, private and public hospitals/medical facilities, diagnostic laboratories, pharmaceutical companies, not-for-profit organizations, and government organizations and agencies.

• Genetic counselors work in multiple specialty areas, including prenatal, cardiovascular disease, cancer, metabolic disease, neurology, pediatrics, infertility, pharmacogenetics and genomic medicine.

• Increasing demands for genetic expertise in varied fields provides genetic counselors new ways of using their training in genetic counseling. These include working in administration, research, public and professional education, internet companies and websites, public health, laboratory support, public policy, and consulting.

• The average salary for a full-time genetic counselor is $74,000 but ranges up to $250,000 depending on specialty area and experience.

• Most genetic counselors have a Master's degree in human genetics and/or genetic counseling.

• Many different specialist physicians refer their patients to genetic counselors, including obstetrician/gynecologists, primary care physicians, oncologists, gastroenterologists, neurologists, cardiologists, ophthalmologists, and pulmonologists.

• Genetic counselors produce many types of publications, including practice guidelines, abstracts, peer-reviewed articles on original research, websites, brochures, videos, lay articles, book chapters.

• Overall, the majority of genetic counselors (89%) report they are satisfied with their job.

• Master's level genetic counselors formed a professional society in 1979, eight years after the first master's degree training program graduation. There are currently over 2,900 members in this society, the National Society of Genetic Counselors.

• The American Board of Genetic Counseling certifies genetic counselors.

• The Accreditation Council for Genetic Counseling accredits genetic counseling training programs.

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1 http://www.usnews.com/education/best-graduate-schools/articles/2014/03/19/study-a-hot-concentration-today-for-a-future-health-care-job

2 http://www.bls.gov/ooh/healthcare/genetic-counselors.htm
INTRODUCTION

The National Society of Genetic Counselors (NSGC), incorporated in 1979, advances the various roles of genetic counselors in health care by fostering education, research, and public policy to ensure the availability of quality genetic services. The NSGC administers a Professional Status Survey (PSS) biannually to its membership. Since the survey was first administered in 1980, the NSGC PSS has served many purposes, including establishing benchmarks for salaries and benefits, identifying workforce issues facing the profession, and gauging job and professional satisfaction in this community. Data from this survey originates from genetic counselors who practice clinically, as well as those in non-clinical roles, such as industry, research, and public health.

The published analysis of the survey data provides a detailed profile of the current NSGC membership and identifies new and emerging trends in the genetic counseling profession. The analysis also provides information useful to individual genetic counseling professionals and those who interact with them, including prospective employers, human resource departments, medical associations, as well as individuals who are considering entering the profession or obtaining genetic counseling services.

This Executive Summary includes a sample of the results from the 2014 PSS. More detailed information can be found in the full suite of PSS reports which are available to NSGC members at no charge. Others can purchase copies of these reports by contacting the NSGC Executive Office, 330 N. Wabash Avenue, Suite 2000, Chicago, IL 60611, nsgc@nsgc.org or (312) 321-6834.

METHODOLOGY

The Professional Status Survey (PSS) was administered to members of the National Society of Genetic Counselors (NSGC) and to diplomates of the American Board of Genetic Counselors (ABGC) from January 13 through February 26, 2014. A total of 1,935 completed surveys were received from the 3,605 solicited, resulting in a 54% percent response rate from all sources. This year’s effort to increase survey participation paid off with a 10% increase in respondents over 2012 and resulted in the largest pool of respondents in the survey’s history.

3 Email lists were pulled from both NSGC and ABGC and duplicates were removed. A few people with different emails listed for ABGC and NSGC may have received the survey invitation twice, so the actual number of surveys sent out to unique individuals may be slightly lower than what is reported.
The comprehensive survey addressed over 200 questions in the following areas:

- Respondent Background
- Professional Status/Job Description
- Work Environment
- Salary and Benefits
- Board Certification/Licensure/Credentialing
- Faculty Appointments
- Professional Activities
- Job Satisfaction

ABOUT THE NSGC

Since it was established 30 years ago, the NSGC has grown into an organization of over 2,900 dynamic individuals with expertise in genetics, counseling, education, and research. This professional organization, in partnership with genetic counseling graduate programs, continues to make concerted efforts to increase professional diversity in all areas, including educational background, ethnicity, religion, gender, and age. Many practicing genetic counselors in the NSGC work in a major metropolitan area; however, almost half of these individuals serve smaller and more rural communities (Figure 1).

Figure 1. NSGC Membership (U.S., Full Members)
WORK SETTINGS

Most survey respondents (1,422/1,935 or 74%) counseled patients as a regular part of their jobs, while 18% did not counsel patients (345/1,935). Nine percent (168/1,935) did not indicate either way.

The majority of respondents (80%) work full-time (typically 37.5 hours per week), while 17% work part-time (<37.5 hours per week). The most common reported primary work setting for clinicians was University Medical Center (34%; Figure 2).

![Figure 2. Work Settings Clinical Genetic Counselors](image)

![Figure 3. Work Settings Non-Clinical Genetic Counselors](image)
As the professional options for genetic counselors have expanded, the number of specialties reported by respondents to the Professional Status Survey has increased over time. Genetic counselors are integral health care providers to departments with any of the specialties below.

For purposes of the survey, the primary specialty is the area where the genetic counselor reported spending 50 percent or more of her/his time on a daily basis. Within the survey, a specialty area was defined as “the subject area of your practice.” Most genetic counselors work in specific areas (see Figures 4 and 5).

“Other specialty” in order of frequency reported (highest to lowest percentage): Research, General Genetics, Cardiology, Specialty Disease, Laboratory, Metabolic Disease (including Lysosomal Storage), Education; Public or Professional, Infertility, ART/IVF, Neurogenetics, Adult (including complex disease), PGD/Preconception, Administration, Newborn Screening, Genomic Medicine, Genetic Testing, Screening (Multiple Marker), Hematology, Molecular/Cytogenetics/Biochemical Testing, Personal Genomics/Genomic Profiling, Support Group/Advocacy, Teratogens, Pharmacogenetics, Population based/Biobanking, Public Health, ELSI, Psychiatric.
“Other specialty” in order of frequency reported (highest to lowest percentage): Prenatal, Genetic Testing, Education; Public or Professional, Administration, Metabolic Disease (including Lysosomal Storage), Genomic Medicine, Screening (Multiple Marker), Cardiology, Neurogenetics, Newborn Screening, Public Health, Specialty Disease, Population based/Biobanking, Pediatric, Support Group/Advocacy, General Genetics, Adult (including complex disease), Personal Genomics/Genomic Profiling, Pharmacogenetics, ELSI, Psychiatric, Infertility, ART/IVF, PGD/Preconception, Hematology, Teratogens.

### PRIMARY ROLES

After identifying their primary specialty, respondents were asked questions regarding their primary role within this specialty. Within the survey, a primary role was defined as “the job function(s) in which you spend the more than 50% of your time.” Respondents were allowed to indicate more than one primary role. Genetic counselors are trained to develop skills that allow them to act in the following roles.
“Other roles” in order of frequency: Project Management, Customer Liaison, Management (for profit/not-for-profit), Clerical, Advocacy, Financial/Contract/Budget Development or Management, Healthcare Administration, Writing.

“Other roles” in order of frequency reported (highest to lowest percentage): Clinical Coordination, Marketing (of services, products, etc.), Clinical Care, Clinical Management, Healthcare Administration, Clerical, Public Policy, Grant Writing, Advocacy, Financial/Contract/Budget Development or Management.
Twenty-two percent of respondents (407/1,896) hold a faculty appointment. About two-thirds of these faculty appointments are at the place of employment and the remainder are appointments at other institutions. Only nine of the faculty members reported being in a tenure track appointment. Many institutions are granting faculty appointments to genetic counselors.

“Other” faculty positions include: Clinical Associate Professor, Professor, Research, Associate/Assistant/Professor, Volunteer Faculty, Clinical Professor, Preceptor, Research Scientist/Investigator.
Specific salary information for full-time genetic counselors is available through the NSGC by viewing the “Salary and Benefits Report.” Salary information is segmented by clinical and non-clinical genetic counselors using the following variables:

- Gender
- Region
- State/Province
- Years of Experience
- Region by Years of Experience
- Specialty Areas
- Specialty Areas by Years Experience
- Work Setting
- Job Classification
- Earned Degrees
- Faculty Titles
- Certification Status
- Licensure
- Major Metropolitan Areas

The Salary & Benefits Report provides detailed analyses of salaries in the genetic counseling profession. The report also provides information about per diem and hourly rates, bonuses and commissions, average raises and extra income, benefits, vacation time, conference funding and employer-funded extras for genetic counselors.

Copies of the report can be obtained by contacting the NSGC Executive Office, 330 N. Wabash Avenue, Suite 2000, Chicago, IL 60611, nsgc@nsgc.org or (312) 321-6834.
**BENEFITS**

The table below shows how often employers provided the following benefits to respondents of the 2014 PSS. More detailed information about benefits for part-time workers is provided in the Salary and Benefits Report.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1. Benefits</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>1,729</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dental</td>
<td>1,679</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life</td>
<td>1,508</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retirement savings (with or without employer match)</td>
<td>1,524</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disability (short or long term)</td>
<td>1,466</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vision plan</td>
<td>1,425</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-tax expense accounts (childcare, medical)</td>
<td>1,234</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wellness</td>
<td>826</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuition reimbursement</td>
<td>702</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pension</td>
<td>511</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parking</td>
<td>405</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation</td>
<td>231</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stock options/Employee stock purchase plan</td>
<td>199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Profit sharing</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None of the above</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Respondents</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,869</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITIES**

Respondents to the 2014 Professional Status Survey were asked to indicate the degree to which they are involved in the genetic counseling profession by identifying specific professional activities they engaged in during the past year. The table below shows the specific non-research professional activities in which genetic counselors were involved. (Professional activities are discussed in more detail in the 2014 Professional Status Survey Work Environment Report, available for purchase).

The NSGC supports genetic counselors’ engagement in professional activities, which can also promote the institutions/medical centers/companies where the genetic counselor works.
### Table 2. Professional Activities (Non-Research)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>% of Cases</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Created patient education materials</td>
<td>1,057</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Served as an NSGC SIG member</td>
<td>753</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developed, coordinated, or served on an advisory board, or been a resource for support groups or voluntary organizations</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developed genetics curriculum for students/teachers</td>
<td>458</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developed or organized a conference, workshop, or symposium for health professionals (including NSGC conference activities)</td>
<td>392</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Served on committee of NSGC, ASHG, ACMG, or other not-for-profit organization.</td>
<td>335</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was interviewed by media</td>
<td>322</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developed or organized a conference, workshop, or symposium for patients</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>224</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Served as a reviewer for journal submissions</td>
<td>220</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Served on local, state, or national committee dealing with delivery of health or genetic services</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worked to develop licensure for genetic counselors in my state</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Served as a resource for local/regional/national legislators on genetic services/issues</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Served on board of NSGC, ABGC, ASHG, or other not-for-profit organization.</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worked to establish successful billing for genetic counselors in my state</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Served as a SIG member of ASHG, ACMG, or other not-for-profit organization</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Served on editorial board for journal</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Served as an item writer for ABGC</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Served as a site visitor for ABGC</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Multiple responses allowed. Percentages are based on the number of respondents that indicated each activity.

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**GRANTS**

Between January 2012 and December 2013, the percentage of genetic counselors who reported receiving grant funding was 7.4% (144/1935). Of the 144 who received grant funding, 88 (61%) reported their funding in dollar amounts. The grants awarded ranged from $100 to $13 million. While the PSS data published in 2012 showed more genetic counselors reporting grant funding (10%), the dollar amounts of the grants reported in the 2014 PSS were more significant, including several million dollar grants.
The majority of PSS respondents reported involvement in teaching and education, primarily with genetic counselors and genetic counseling students.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3. Teaching and Education Activities*</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>% of Cases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genetic counselors/students</td>
<td>1189</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physicians/medical students/residents/fellows</td>
<td>1126</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nurses/nursing students</td>
<td>412</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other health professionals</td>
<td>368</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undergraduate students</td>
<td>352</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community organizations (including churches)/lay public</td>
<td>265</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advocacy/support groups</td>
<td>235</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kindergarten-12th grade</td>
<td>234</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laboratory professionals/technicians/residents/fellows</td>
<td>233</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate students other than genetic counseling students</td>
<td>192</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physician Assistants/students</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business or other non-health professionals</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social workers/students</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1,757</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Overall, the majority of genetic counselors (89%) reported they were satisfied with the profession. Respondents were most satisfied with the professional opportunities that were associated with their work: scientific content, learning opportunities, counseling patients, and the opportunity for personal growth. They expressed less satisfaction with their professional opportunities as they related to career growth, particularly opportunities for advancement and earning potential (Figure 9).

More details are available in the Professional Satisfaction Report, available through the NSGC. The report examines the various facets of satisfaction with the genetic counseling profession. Copies of the report can be obtained by contacting the NSGC Executive Office, 330 N. Wabash Avenue, Suite 2000, Chicago, IL 60611, nsgc@nsgc.org or (312) 321-6834.