

Further Information

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

Manchester

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

Wales

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

The AGNC website includes details of:

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

www.agnc.org.uk

Leaflet produced by the AGNC

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.

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

The Association of Genetic Nurses and Counsellors (AGNC) has developed a process for standardised education and training of genetic counsellors.

Practitioners who are eligible to register will have either a background in nursing or midwifery or have completed a Master's degree in genetic counselling with a substantial clinical component.

In either case, the practitioner should have undergone counselling skills training of at least 120 hours duration and will have completed a course in the science of human genetics of at least 30 hours.

Genetic counsellors seeking professional registration will be expected to have completed a period of training (at least 2 years) covering a broad spectrum of genetic counselling.

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.

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 bowel 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?

Genetic counsellors enter the profession from a variety of backgrounds. Some have a clinical background such as nursing or midwifery, or a social care background such as social work. Some genetic counsellors are graduates who have undertaken an MSc. in Genetic counselling.

If you are a graduate nurse or midwife, have two years post-registration experience, and have completed counselling skills training of at least 120 hours duration, you may be eligible to apply for a position as a genetic counsellor. Additional education or experience in the field of genetics is also desirable.

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 a Master's degree 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 institutions offering a Master's degree in genetic counselling in the United Kingdom. These are the University of Manchester and the University of Wales.