



Association of Genetic Nurses and Counsellors

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A constituent group of the British Society for Genetic Medicine

AGNC Code of Ethics

Introduction

This code of ethics attempts to clarify and guide the conduct of genetic counsellors at all levels of training and professional registration working in the United Kingdom and Ireland. It acknowledges that ethical practice is essential in four main areas of responsibility, as listed below. All genetic counsellors must be aware of the ethical implications of their professional role, and adhere to the principles and guidelines in this code. This code of ethics is due for review in 2024.

(A) Self-awareness and development

Genetic counsellors should:

- Be aware of their own physical and emotional health and take appropriate action to prevent an adverse impact on their professional performance
- Report to an appropriate person or authority any conscientious objection that may be relevant to their professional practice
- Maintain and improve their own professional education and competence
- Acknowledge and disclose circumstances that may result in a real or perceived conflict of interest.

(B) Relationships with clients

Genetic counsellors should:

- Enable clients to make informed independent decisions, free from coercion, through the use of a range of counselling theories and styles.
- Respect the client's personal beliefs and their right to make their own decisions
- Respect clients, irrespective of disability, age, ethnic origin, marital status, sexual orientation, religious beliefs or gender
- Avoid any abuse of their professional relationship with clients
- Protect all confidential information concerning clients obtained in the course of professional practice: disclosures of such information should only be made with the client's consent, unless disclosure can be justified because of a significant risk to others

- Report to an appropriate person or authority any circumstance, action or individual that may jeopardise client care, or their health and safety.
- Seek all relevant information required for any given client situation
- Refer clients to other competent professionals if they have needs outside the professional expertise of the genetic counsellor
- Genetic Counsellors have a statutory duty to apply the principle of being open under the guidance of the Duty of Candour (Department of Health 2014) to inform and apologise to patients if there have been mistakes in their care that have led to harm.

(C) Relationships with colleagues

Genetic counsellors should:

- Collaborate and co-operate with other colleagues in order to provide the highest quality of service to the client
- Foster relationships with other members of the clinical genetics team, to ensure that clients benefit from a multidisciplinary approach to care
- Assist colleagues to develop their knowledge of clinical genetics and genetic counselling
- Report to an appropriate person or authority any circumstance or action which may jeopardise the health and safety of a colleague

(D) Responsibilities within the wider society

Genetic counsellors should:

- Provide reliable and expert information to the general public
- Adhere to the laws and regulations of society. However, when such laws are in conflict with the principles of practice, genetic counsellors should work toward change that will benefit the public interest
- Seek to influence policy makers on human genetic and genomic issues, both as an individual and/or through membership of professional bodies

This code of ethics is based on similar documents produced by the National Society of Genetic Counselors (NSGC) of the USA and the United Kingdom Central Council for Nursing and Midwifery (UKCC). The AGNC wish to acknowledge the guidance provided by these documents and thank these organisations for their availability.