



Code of Ethics

The AGNC Code of Ethics provides clarity and guidance for the ethical and professional conduct of genetic counsellors at all levels of training and professional registration working in the United Kingdom and Ireland. It highlights four main areas of genetic counselling practice and responsibility, where adherence to the ethical standards is considered essential. All genetic counsellors must be aware of the ethical implications of their professional role, and adhere to the principles and guidelines in this code. The AGNC Code of Ethics should be used in conjunction with the stipulated codes of practice and/or conduct from the relevant genetic counselling regulatory body (GCRB, NMC, AHCS and HCPC). This code of ethics is due for review in 2024.

Genetic counsellors should:

(A) Self-awareness and development :
1. Be aware of their own physical and emotional health and take appropriate action to prevent an adverse impact on their professional performance
2. Report to an appropriate person or authority any conscientious objection that may be relevant to their professional practice
3. Maintain and improve their own professional education and competence
4. Acknowledge and disclose circumstances that may result in a real or perceived conflict of interest.
5. Inform the appropriate regulatory body without delay if, at any time, you have accepted a caution, been charged with or found guilty of a criminal offence, or if any finding has been made against you as a result of fitness to practice procedures, or if you are suspended from a scientific post, or if you have any restrictions placed on your scientific, clinical or technical practice.

(B) Relationships with service users including patients, families, and carers

1. Never discriminate unfairly against patients, carers or colleagues and the public.

2. Understand the need to respect and uphold the rights, dignity, values and autonomy of service users including their role in the diagnostic and therapeutic process and in maintaining health and well-being

3. Avoid any abuse of their professional relationship with service users

4. Recognise that relationships with service users should be based on mutual respect and trust, and be able to maintain high standards of care even in situations of personal incompatibility

5. Enable service users and their families to make informed independent decisions, free from coercion, through the use of a range of counselling theories and styles

6. Protect all confidential information concerning service users obtained in the course of professional practice: disclosures of such information should only be made with the service user's consent, unless disclosure can be justified because of a significant risk to others

7. Report to an appropriate person or authority any circumstance, action or individual that may jeopardise patient care, or their health and safety.

8. Seek all relevant information required for any given patient situation

9. Refer patients to other competent professionals if they have needs outside the professional expertise of the genetic counsellor

10. 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

1. Treat colleagues with dignity and respect
2. Collaborate and co-operate with colleagues in order to provide the highest quality of service to the patients, carers and families
3. Foster relationships with colleagues across all areas of service delivery as required to ensure that patients and families benefit from a multidisciplinary approach to care
4. Assist colleagues to develop their knowledge of clinical genetics, genomics and genetic counselling
5. Maintain and apply quality standards, control and assurance techniques
6. 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

1. Practice in accordance with the Genetic Counsellor Registration Board (GCRB) Code of Conduct or their designated regulatory body
2. Provide reliable and expert information to the general public
3. 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
4. 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 Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) in the UK. The AGNC wish to acknowledge the guidance provided by these documents and thank these organisations for their availability. Similarly the AGNC acknowledge the support and input of the Genetic Counsellor Registration Board (GCRB).

Revised and updated by Georgina Hall, Vishakha Tripathi and Catherine Watt January 2021