



CODE OF CONDUCT

1: RESPONSIBILITIES AND SCOPE OF PRACTICE

Genetic counsellors have a responsibility to maintain high standards of professional and personal conduct, always acting within the current AGNC Code of Ethics and scope of genetic counsellors' practice.

1.1 'Genetic Counsellors'

In order to protect patients and professionals it is anticipated that the title 'Registered Genetic Counsellor' will be protected in law and genetic counselling will be recognised as a profession. The Health Act 1999 seeks to secure and regulate professionals and the services they provide.

The title 'Registered Genetic Counsellor' can only be used after an individual has undergone the process of genetic counsellor registration as stipulated by the Genetic Counsellor Registration Board UK and ROI. It is mandatory for genetic counsellors to renew their registration every 5 years whilst they continue to practice.

1.2 Genetic counsellors' code of ethics and scope of practice

The AGNC Code of Ethics clarifies and guides the conduct of genetic counsellors. It acknowledges that ethical practice is essential in four main areas of responsibility: self-awareness and development, relationships with clients, relationships with colleagues and responsibilities within the wider society. All genetic counsellors must be aware of the ethical implications of their professional role, and adhere to the principles and guidelines in this code (AGNC Code of Ethics, 2003).

1.3 Scope of practice

- Collect and interpret comprehensive client information, including medical, psychological and genetic family history.
- Make appropriate and accurate genetic risk assessments.
- Use therapeutic counselling and communication skills with clients to help them:
 - comprehend medical facts about a genetic disorder.
 - appreciate the way heredity contributes to the disorder, and the risk of recurrence in specified relatives.
 - understand options for dealing with the risk of recurrence.
 - choose the course of action that seems to them appropriate.
 - make the best possible adjustment to the disorder in an affected family member and/or the risk of recurrence of that disorder.

- Make psychosocial assessments of client need, providing support and referral to other agencies as appropriate.
- Plan, organise and deliver professional and public education in genetic healthcare.
- Serve as a genetic healthcare resource for professionals and the general public.
- Liaise with other members of the genetics multidisciplinary team to provide optimum services for clients.

1.4 Delegation of duties

Genetic counsellors who delegate duties to others, such as genetic counsellor students and trainees who are not Registered Genetic Counsellors must be satisfied that the person is competent to undertake that duty and provide an appropriate level of supervision. Genetic counsellors delegating duties to genetic counsellor students and trainees will retain responsibility for the care provided for the client at all times.

2: DUTY OF CARE

Genetic counsellors should always act in the best interests of patients, respecting the patient as an individual, avoiding causing harm, and promoting and protecting the interests and dignity of the individual, irrespective of gender, age, race, ability, sexuality, economic status, lifestyle, culture and religious or political beliefs.

2.1 Relationships with clients

Genetic counsellors should:

- 2.1.1** Enable clients to make informed independent decisions, free from coercion
- 2.1.2** Respect the client's personal beliefs and their right to make their own decisions.
- 2.1.3** Respect clients, irrespective of their ethnic origin, sexual orientation, religious beliefs, gender and age.
- 2.1.4** Avoid any abuse of their professional relationship with clients.
- 2.1.5** 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. Where this occurs, disclosure should only occur after discussion with suitably qualified colleagues.
- 2.1.6** Report to an appropriate person or authority any circumstance, action or individual that may jeopardise client care, or their health and safety.

- 2.1.7 Seek all relevant information required for any given client situation
- 2.1.8 Refer clients to other competent professionals if they have needs outside the remit or professional expertise of the genetic counsellor.

(AGNC Code of Ethics, 2003)

3: RESPECTING CONFIDENTIALITY

Genetic counsellors must respect the confidentiality of patients and families.

Genetic counsellors should be familiar with and act within the guidance set out in '*Consent and Confidentiality in Genetics Practice: Guidance on genetic testing and sharing genetic information*' (JCMG 2006)

4: OBTAINING INFORMED CONSENT

Genetic counsellors must obtain and record informed consent in accordance with professional guidance and current legislation.

Genetic counsellors should be familiar with and act within the guidance set out in '*Consent and Confidentiality in Genetics Practice: Guidance on genetic testing and sharing genetic information*' (JCMG 2006).

5: COLLABORATION WITH COLLEAGUES

Genetic counsellors should work collaboratively with other health care professionals in the interests of patients, teaching and research.

5.1 Relationships with colleagues

Genetic counsellors should:

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

(AGNC Code of Ethics, 2003)

6: MAINTAINING PROFESSIONAL KNOWLEDGE AND COMPETENCE AND MINIMISING RISKS TO PATIENTS

Genetic counsellors' practice must be evidence-based, recognising professional boundaries and referring on to other health professionals if appropriate. Knowledge and skills must be maintained through continuous professional development, genetic counselling supervision and registration and comply with statutory health and safety policies.

7: PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL INTEGRITY AND HONESTY

Genetic counsellors must ensure that they act within legal and ethical boundaries and carry out duties in a professional and ethical way, behaving with integrity and honesty.

7.1 Self-awareness and development

Genetic counsellors should:

- 7.1.1 Be aware of their own physical and emotional health and take appropriate action to prevent an adverse impact on their professional performance.
- 7.1.2 Report to an appropriate person or authority any conscientious objection that may be relevant to their professional practice.
- 7.1.3 Maintain and improve their own professional education and competence.

(AGNC Code of Ethics, 2003)

7.2 Responsibilities within the wider society

Genetic counsellors should:

- 7.2.1 Provide reliable and expert information to the general public.
- 7.2.2 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.
- 7.2.3 Seek to influence policy makers on human genetic issues, both as an individual and/or through membership of professional bodies.

(AGNC Code of Ethics, 2003)

8: PROFESSIONAL INDEMNITY

It is recommended that Registered Genetic Counsellors have professional indemnity insurance. This is in the interests of registrants and patients in the event of claims and professional negligence.

8.1 Independent practice

Whilst some employers have vicarious liability for the negligent acts and/or omissions of their employees, such cover does not normally extend to activities undertaken outside the registrant's employment. Independent practice would not be covered by vicarious liability. It is the individual registrant's responsibility to establish their insurance status and take appropriate action.

References

Joint Committee on Medical Genetics (2006). Consent and confidentiality in genetic practice: guidance on genetic testing and sharing information. ([www.bshg.org.uk/documents/official_docs/Consent_and_confid_corrected_21\[1\].8.06.pdf](http://www.bshg.org.uk/documents/official_docs/Consent_and_confid_corrected_21[1].8.06.pdf))

Association of Genetic Nurses and Counsellors (2003). AGNC Code of Ethics. (www.agnc.org.uk/About%20us/codeofethics.htm)