

ASGC Code of Ethics

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ASGC Code of Ethics

SECTION 1: GENETIC COUNSELLORS THEMSELVES

PREAMBLE

Section 1 aims to identify the fundamental professional commitment of genetic counsellors. It provides genetic counsellors with a basis for professional and self-reflection and a guide to ethical practice. Continuing education and enhancement of knowledge and skills are central to the genetic counsellor in ensuring the provision of optimal care and the highest standard of practice.

Genetic counsellors have a responsibility to the individual, society and the profession to provide counselling which is responsive to individual, group, and community needs. They are personally accountable for their practice, and in their conduct of this practice should act in such a manner as to respect the interests of individual clients, enhance the general health and well being of the community, justify public trust, and enhance the reputation of the profession.

Genetic counsellors value competence, integrity, dignity and self-respect in themselves and in each other. Therefore, in order to be the best possible human resource to themselves, their clients, their colleagues and society, genetic counsellors strive to:

1. Be responsible for their own physical and emotional health as it impacts on their performance.
2. Seek out and acquire information as required in their role.
3. Continue their education and training.
4. Keep abreast of current standards of practice.
5. Recognise the limits of their own knowledge, expertise and therefore competence in any given situation; where this limit is exceeded, seek guidance from a person with more experience in dealing with such problems or make appropriate referrals.

6. Participate in regular supervision for themselves and be willing to be a supervisor for others and not require anyone under their supervision to engage in any practice that is a violation of the code of ethics.
7. Contribute to the continuing development of the profession. Conduct research, including evaluation, according to approved ethical practice.
8. Be involved only in practices which are legally and ethically sound.
9. Ensure that any form of public statement accurately represents their professional abilities, skills and services.
10. Contribute to professional development and maintain membership of the professional association.

SECTION 2: GENETIC COUNSELLORS' RESPONSIBILITY TO THEIR CLIENTS

PREAMBLE

Section 2 aims to clarify the genetic counsellor-client relationship and highlight the values and responsibilities therein. In describing this relationship, consideration was given to the terms "counselee", "consultand", "patient" and "client". The term "client" was selected to describe those seeking genetic counselling.

The values relating to the client are based on caring, and respect for the individuality, the welfare, and the freedom of choice of the client. These values influence the way genetic counsellors work. Acceptance of all clients who represent a wide diversity of personal values, beliefs, and cultures is a reflection of the value of respect for the client's individuality.

The value of confidentiality is respected. It should be noted that discussing the specifics of a case with colleagues in order to gain insight for the benefit of the client, or to educate them, without identifying the client, is not to be regarded as a breach of confidentiality.

The respect for autonomy remains paramount. Although many consultations take place in a clinical setting, genetic counsellors strive for an interactive exchange encouraging the client to become autonomous.

The establishment of trust is a vital component in the counsellor-client relationship and such trust should be based on honesty and candour. Therefore, discussing, providing, and delivering information carries responsibilities for genetic counsellors. They are expected to work completely and honestly towards the best interests of the client. Therefore, genetic counsellors strive to:

1. Provide genetic services to all individuals in a non-discriminatory fashion.
2. Discuss clinically relevant information and options with clients and attempt to ensure an appropriate level of understanding.
3. Ensure qualified interpreters are present at counselling sessions as appropriate.
4. Be aware of how their own experiences and values may influence the process and outcomes of genetic counselling.

5. Provide information and emotional support to enable clients to make choices in accordance with their own values and beliefs.
6. Respect the confidentiality and privacy of the client.
7. Avoid the exploitation of clients for personal advantage, profit or interest.
8. Follow accepted guidelines in obtaining informed consent before genetic testing or inclusion in research studies.
9. Facilitate referrals to other competent professionals where appropriate.

SECTION 3: GENETIC COUNSELLORS, THEIR COLLEAGUES AND THEIR PROFESSION

PREAMBLE

Section 3 aims to address the duty and responsibility genetic counsellors have to themselves, their colleagues and the profession as a whole. The aim is for genetic counsellors to be regarded as an integral part of the health care team.

Genetic counsellors must be able to initiate, build and maintain effective working relationships with other professionals. They may work with a diverse range of health professions and community based organisations. These relationships require the recognition and mutual respect of professional boundaries and experience, as well as an attitude of trust, care, flexibility and cooperation. They are committed to the acquisition and sharing of knowledge.

Genetic counsellors are encouraged to be members of the Australasian Society of Genetic Counsellors, a special interest group of the Human Genetics Society of Australasia, that exists to support them. They recognise they have a duty to contribute to the society by attending meetings, giving presentations, participating on committees and holding offices. Genetic counsellors are committed to supporting, encouraging and sharing expertise and knowledge with individual members of the profession.

The genetic counsellor's relationship with other genetic counsellors, genetic counselling students and other professionals is based on mutual respect, caring, cooperation and support. Through commitment to their profession, genetic counsellors strive to:

1. Work as a team with other professionals, recognising the traditions, practices and expertise of all members, to contribute to comprehensive care for each client.
2. Foster their relationship with other genetic counsellors and genetic counselling students by contributing to the maintenance of a peer support network based on the principles of confidentiality and trust.
3. Respect their colleagues.
4. Ensure they comply with all legal duties owed to their employer.
5. Manage the resources of the professional association effectively, efficiently and accountably and contribute to the development of the association.

SECTION 4 GENETIC COUNSELLORS AND SOCIETY

PREAMBLE

Section 4 aims to guide genetic counsellors in focussing on the client's rights for self-determination, while maintaining a professional awareness of the political, economic and social challenges that have significance for clients and genetic counsellors, as new technologies are developed and utilised.

Genetic counsellors believe that a person has a much greater chance of achieving satisfactory psychological adjustment to any difficult choice or outcome if they have been given the opportunity to explore their feelings and beliefs about the different scenarios presenting to them, and have been supported in their personal choice.

"Society" through its laws, regulations, institutional structures and cost impositions, may subtly and/or inadvertently reduce an individual's freedom of self-determination, possibly jeopardising their adjustment. When aiming to reduce the burden of genetic disease in the community, genetic services should strive to ensure that economic and other considerations are of secondary importance to the physical and psychological needs of the individual. The individual's right of choice should be fundamental.

A complex array of issues impact on the development of genetics services. It is of paramount importance that genetic counsellors as individuals and as a group contribute to ongoing societal debate about how the political, economic and social forces interact with the strong ideological stance of self-determination.

Genetic counsellors strive to:

1. Be an advocate for the individual's rights.
2. Promote the equality of all individuals.
3. Maintain an awareness of societal developments which may endanger the physical and psychological health of individuals.
4. Respect the laws and regulations of their country and other societies.
5. Serve as a source of reliable information and expert opinion.
6. Promote public education and understanding of new technological and scientific advances; encourage public debate on the possible impact and changes in society that may result from the application of these advances.

Adapted with permission from the National Society of Genetic Counsellors, Inc. Code of Ethics, USA (1992)

The National Society of Genetic Counsellors, Inc. (1992)

The National Society of Genetic Counsellors Code of Ethics. Journal of Genetic Counselling 1 (1): 41-43

History of the Code of Ethics

Members of the Australasian Society of Genetic Counsellors (ASGC), voted at their annual meeting in March 1994 to establish a code of ethics for genetic counsellors.

A committee was established. Committee members reviewed six codes of ethics from various Australian professional societies including Australian Association of Social Workers, Australian Psychological Society, Australian Association of Occupational Therapists, Australian Physiotherapy Association, Australian Association of Speech and Hearing, and the Australian Nursing Council. The American National Society of Genetic Counsellors (NSGC) code of ethics* and the Canadian College of Medical Geneticists code of ethics were also reviewed. The committee found the code of ethics from the NSGC excellent and noted the relevance to genetic counsellors in Australasia. Using the points covered in the NSGC code of ethics, the ASGC code of ethics was developed into four sections. These are genetic counsellors responsibility to themselves; their clients; their colleagues, and society.

The process of reviewing the various codes and establishing the format took approximately eighteen months. During this period the committee met via teleconferencing, and face to face meetings at ASGC meetings and Human Genetics Society of Australasia (HGSA) annual scientific meetings (ASMs). Committee members worked in pairs or threes on particular sections developing and reviewing the code of ethics for the ASGC.

The first draft of the ASGC code of ethics was circulated to the membership in June 1996 and a revised draft followed in August 1996. Members of the ASGC discussed and debated the code again at the ASGC meeting held at the HGSA ASM in Adelaide in September 1996 and again in March 1997 at the ASGC meeting in Sydney. Contribution from all members of the ASGC was encouraged and invaluable in developing this document. Finally the revised code of ethics was reviewed by a legal representative.

In 1999 the NSGC was approached inviting comment on the ASGC code of ethics. The NSGC Code of Ethics committee and their Ethics Subcommittee responded with positive support for the ASGC code of ethics. In 2000 the ASGC code of ethics was presented to the HGSA executive for ratification.

Committee members who worked on the code of ethics through the various stages were Kristine Barlow-Stewart, Judith Elber, Kim Frumar, Karen Harrop, Lynn Hulston (Chairperson 1998- present), Pauline McGrath, Margaret Olsen, Marian Rawlins, Lucille Stace (Chairperson 1997-8), Bernadette Taylor, Wil Theewis, Samantha Wake (Chairperson 1994-1997) and Sue White.

* *The National Society of Genetic Counsellors, Inc. (1992) The National Society of Genetic Counsellors Code Of Ethics. Journal of Genetic Counselling 1(1): 41-43.*

Glossary

Australasian Society of Genetic Counsellors.

A special interest group of the Human Genetics Society of Australasia, comprising individuals who practice genetic counselling, or who have an interest in genetic counselling.

Autonomy.

Provides an individual with the opportunity to express personal freedom and will in decision making.

Client.

Person/s who seeks the services of a suitably qualified and experienced practitioner.

Colleagues.

Person/s similarly qualified and or working in the same health care team.

Confidentiality.

Entrusted in confidence, either spoken or written, with the client's information.

Consultand.

The individual requesting genetic counselling. A consultand need not be affected with a disease, he/she could simply be concerned about a perceived risk.

Counselee.

An individual who is receiving or has received genetic counselling.

Genetic Counsellor.

A health professional with specialised training in genetics and counselling who can provide information and support to individuals or families with concerns about a genetic disorder that may run in the family. Those genetic counsellors who have not completed their training usually denote themselves as Associate genetic counsellors.

Ethical Practice.

The practice of a profession within an ethical framework, including the principles of justice, autonomy, beneficence and non maleficence.

Health Care Team.

Health care professionals working directly and indirectly to contribute to the total health care needs of the client.

Health professionals.

Groups of individuals within the health care team who have the following attributes:

- Recognised skill pertaining to their profession.
- Adherence to a certain standard of practice.
- A recognised training program to achieve their skill.

Human Genetics Society of Australasia.

An association of persons united by a common interest in the field of human genetics.

Informed consent.

Consent obtained on the basis of the provision of current relevant information.

Interpreters.

A qualified person with the training to interpret medical and family information.

Privacy.

In the context of genetic counselling, privacy rights involve the affirmation of confidentiality and freedom of choice. These privacy rights may not always be absolute.

Self determination.

Fixing of purpose or intent by oneself, using one's freewill.

Supervisor.

A person who is suitably qualified and experienced to discuss, assess and provide support to enhance the performance of the counsellor.