

Certification in Genetic Counselling

Ratified July 2001

A. DEFINITION AND DUTIES

Genetic counsellors have background training in a wide variety of disciplines including nursing, science, social work, education and psychology.

The HGSA certified genetic counsellor is part of the team delivering genetic services. The role of the genetic counsellor is varied and depends on the needs of the particular genetic clinic or their employment. The HGSA certified genetic counsellor who works in a clinical setting has a primary role in the provision of genetic counselling.

In addition to the provision of genetic counselling the core clinic duties may include:

- genetic clinic organisation
- intake sessions before the diagnostic visit
- follow-up of families and individuals
- responsibility for documentation that includes pedigree taking and recording of social, economic and psychological factors.

Genetic counsellors may also be involved with screening programmes, DNA testing programmes, research, genetic education and promotional activities including assisting support groups. Some counsellors may have a major involvement in a specific area, eg. genetic education.

B. TRAINING AND CERTIFICATION

The HGSA set up a Board of Censors for Genetic Counselling (hereafter called the Board), to oversee the training of genetic counsellors in 1989. The Board consists of a certified clinical geneticist, a specialist practitioner in counselling, eg a genetic social worker, and a further three to five genetic counsellors. A majority of Board members are HGSA certified.

The Board recommends that any person involved in genetic counselling should be trained in genetics, principles and practice of counselling, and interview techniques. The Board has produced certification in genetic counselling guidelines that should be followed by all candidates.

The process to obtain general genetic counselling certification is divided into Part I and Part II. There are fees for both Part I and Part II. Part I certification

involves undertaking the necessary course work in genetics and counselling to complete a checklist of requirements. There are also graduate diploma of genetic counselling and masters of genetic counselling courses which are recognised by the Board as fulfilling Part I requirements. Part II certification involves a minimum of two years full time equivalent work as a genetic counsellor, during which time candidates must keep a log book of 100 cases, and complete 20 written case studies. Candidates must undertake both genetic and counselling supervision for the duration of their Part II certification time period.

Candidates are encouraged to make regular submissions to the Board, which accepts candidate submissions twice annually. The Board undertakes to give guidance about training requirements to individual candidates, and provides feedback on all candidates written submissions. The Board has the discretion to ask individual candidates to complete additional requirements to achieve certification.

Speciality training in the area of cancer genetic counselling is available; the certification process is divided into Part I and Part II. Part I training is as described above. Part II training is gained through employment equivalent to one full time year, in a recognised clinic or unit. In addition, 10 written case studies and a logbook of 50 cases must be submitted. Counselling and genetic supervision is as required for general genetic counselling training. If a person certified in cancer genetic counselling wishes to then train in general genetic counselling, they would need to complete a further one year equivalent of supervised full time work, and submit a further 15 case studies and a logbook of 50 cases.

Copies of the Guidelines for Certification in Genetic Counselling produced by the Board can be obtained from the HGSA Secretariat.

Candidates who have trained as genetic counsellors outside Australia may apply to the Board to determine their eligibility for HGSA certification as a genetic counsellor.