Cancer Genetic Counseling©2004

What is Cancer Genetic Counseling?
Cancer Genetic Counseling is a professional assessment of a patient's risk factors regarding their cancer family history. The goal of cancer genetic counseling is not only risk assessment, but also to explain cause/inheritance of a family history of cancer, availability of testing, prognosis, medical management, treatment and options. Cancer genetic counseling sessions typically last one to two hours, depending on the complexity of the case. The Genetic Counselor will take your pedigree (family history), request medical records on any family members with cancer, explain the significance of the cancer present in your family, discuss the role of genetics and environment in cancer, as well as the availability of genetic testing. The chances of developing cancer in at-risk family members will be calculated and screening recommendations based on your family history will be reviewed. When available, DNA testing for various cancer predisposition genes is complicated. The Genetic Counselor will discuss in detail the significance of possible test results and their impact on the at-risk family members. Issues which impact decisions will be explored when appropriate, such as family dynamics, the medical management of at-risk family members with/without genetic testing, confidentiality, insurability and family planning.

What type of training do Genetic Counselors have?
Genetic Counselors have a minimum of a master's degree in genetic counseling or a related field. The former includes extensive training in both human genetics as well as psychology. Board Certification is offered every three years by the American Board of Genetic Counseling. All Genetic Counselors at Emory are Board-Certified and work under the supervision of a Board-Certified M.D. Clinical Geneticist.

Why is my doctor referring me for Genetic Counseling?
Genetic Counseling is recommended by the American College of Medical Genetics (ASMG) and the American Society of Clinical Oncologists (ASCO) for persons with a positive family history of cancer who wish to explore the possibility of genetic testing, to meet the requirements of informed consent. At Emory, we have Board-Certified Genetic Counselors and Clinical Geneticists who specialize in cancer genetics.

How can I prepare for my meeting with the Genetic Counselor?
Medical records on family members with cancer are critical in accurately determining cancer risks in a family. When possible, obtaining medical records prior to your meeting with the Genetic Counselor is desirable. It is often helpful to bring someone with you to the genetic counseling session, such as your spouse, parent, sibling, or close friend, who can support you through the decision making process, particularly if you are planning to have genetic testing. Results of DNA testing for cancer predisposition genes are given in person, in a post-test genetic counseling session. Patients tell us that having a support person from beginning to end is preferable to going through the process alone.

Appointments for cancer genetic counseling can be made by calling (404)778-8549.