

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**GENETIC COUNSELORS CAN HELP YOU  
NAVIGATE THE MURKY WATERS OF GENETIC TESTING**  
*Answers to Six Important Questions about Genetic Counseling*

CHICAGO – **Nov. 9, 2017** – Social and regular media are filled with information about all the genetic tests available and the latest genes discovered by researchers. You can't help but wonder whether you should be tested and what the results might mean. So where do you turn? Genetic counselors are the professionals who can help guide you.

Wait, genetic *what*?

“Many people are confused about what a genetic counselor does, and many who might benefit from seeing a genetic counselor may not know we exist,” said Mary Freivogel, president of the [National Society of Genetic Counselors](#) (NSGC). “Simply put, genetic counselors have advanced training in medical genetics *and* counseling and can be a vital part of your healthcare team by helping you understand how inherited diseases and conditions might affect you or your family. We can provide guidance on whether genetic tests may or may not be right for you and help you make informed choices about your healthcare.”

Genetic counselors work in many areas of medicine, including cancer, prenatal, cardiology, neurology, infertility, pediatric and adult. Many work directly with patients in various healthcare settings, while others do research or work in education, public health or in industry settings.

Nov. 9 is Genetic Counselor Awareness Day, the perfect time to answer some questions about this growing and important profession.

1. **Q:** My doctor knows my family history. Can't he or she provide the same kind of guidance I would get from a genetic counselor?

**A:** Genetic counselors are a part of the healthcare team and work collaboratively with you AND your doctor. Depending on the specialty and training of your doctor, he or she may not have the time and expertise to help you fully understand how genetic diseases and conditions might affect you or your family. Genetic counselors are experts at interpreting and explaining complex genetic information to both you and your doctor while also providing emotional support when necessary. If your genetic counselor and doctor are not in direct contact, be sure to provide any information you learn from a genetic counselor to your doctor so it can be included in your personalized medical management plan.

2. **Q:** Can a genetic counselor tell me whether I'll get a certain disease?

**A:** Nobody can tell you if you are going to get a disease or guarantee that you will not get it. Many things can influence your risk for a disease, and your genes are only one of them. A genetic counselor can help you understand your chances of developing a disease or condition. Regardless of your risk level, a genetic counselor can work with you and your doctor to develop a plan, including screening and prevention options.

3. **Q:** Is the right time to meet with a genetic counselor *after* I've had my genetic tests?

**A:** Many people benefit from meeting with a genetic counselor *before* undergoing a genetic test. A genetic counselor can help you explore whether getting tested is right for you and if so, which test is appropriate and what laboratory should do the test. A genetic counselor can explain what the test can and cannot tell you and can prepare you for the results, which may impact not only you, but members of your family. In some cases, patients choose to decline genetic testing after meeting with a genetic counselor, but still benefit from receiving personalized information about their level of risk, based on their family history and other factors.

4. **Q:** Will a genetic counselor tell me what to do based on my test results?

**A:** A genetic counselor can provide personalized information, guidance and emotional support through the decision-making process but will not tell you what decision to make. Rather, a genetic counselor will help you understand complex genetic information and provide useful insight and perspectives and support you as you make an informed decision about what makes sense for you and your family.

5. **Q:** If I need counseling, shouldn't I see a psychologist or psychotherapist?

**A:** Genetic counselors *counsel*, educate and guide patients about their personalized risk for disease, their options for genetic testing and their thoughts and feelings about what they want to know. Genetic information not only affects the individual, but also family members. Some patients can benefit from a genetic counselor's guidance on how to navigate complex family dynamics when communicating information to relatives. Genetic counselors are not licensed therapists or psychologists but can certainly refer patients for this type of support when necessary.

6. **Q:** I think I might benefit from working with a genetic counselor, but what if I can't afford it?

**A:** Health insurance often pays for genetic counseling. In many cases, insurance also will pay for a genetic test if it is recommended by a genetic counselor or a doctor. However, you should check with your insurance company to find out if it will pay for the specific test you are considering. A genetic counselor can guide you on how to do this. Your insurance plan may cover certain tests, but not others. An advantage to having genetic counseling is that after you receive the information and insight, you may decide you don't want or need a genetic test, which can save you money.

Genetic counselors are healthcare providers with unique, specialized skills and knowledge. In the world of genetics, where things are constantly changing and evolving, genetic counselors will guide and support you as you seek more information about how inherited diseases might affect you and your family. To find a genetic counselor near you, visit [findageneticcounselor.com](http://findageneticcounselor.com).

**About the National Society of Genetic Counselors**

NSGC is the leading voice, authority and advocate for the genetic counseling profession. Membership represents more than 3,600 masters-level health professionals, who are committed to ensuring that the public has access to genetic counseling and genetic testing. Visit [www.NSGC.org](http://www.NSGC.org).

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