

What is genetic counselling?

Genetic counselling is the process of helping individuals and families understand the medical, psychological, social and reproductive implications of genetic and congenital conditions. Genetic counsellors are healthcare professionals with specialist training in the science of genetic disease, communication skills and counselling.

What happens in the sessions?

As part of the consultations, genetic counsellors will:

- Review family, medical and pregnancy history
- Perform risk assessments
- Discuss the inheritance of genetic conditions
- Discuss diseases, their management and surveillance options
- Review testing options
- Help you make a decision on genetic testing if appropriate
- Provide support for patients and their families
- Sign post to other specialists, services and information and support avenues

Additionally genetic counsellors may need to gather information from different sources to confirm a diagnosis and help them make an accurate risk assessment for their patient. These include:

- Family history/ pedigree
- Medical records: Lab reports, pathology reports, genetic results
- Medical literature
- Death certificates

Who has genetic counselling?

Patients who have a strong family history and/or diagnosis of a condition where it is suspected that the condition has occurred due to an underlying genetic factor such as ovarian and breast cancer.

How many sessions do you have before you have genetic testing?

This can be different for each patient.

Some patients may want to go away and think about the information they have been given before deciding if genetic testing is right for them. They will then get in contact with us when they are ready to proceed with testing.

Additionally, a genetic counsellor may not be able to offer genetic testing after the first appointment if they need to gather information from other health professionals before deciding if genetic testing is required. In some instances, patients may agree with their genetic counsellor that it is not the right time to have genetic testing after exploring it with them.

Your genetic counsellor will keep you informed throughout the process and help you with making a decision that is right for you and your family.

Do you see the genetic counsellor after you have genetic testing/ at each stage?

If you have had genetic testing, you will choose how you receive your genetic testing results. This can be in clinic, by telephone or by post.

Your genetic counsellor may offer you further appointments to help you in understanding this result and provide further support as needed. Your genetic counsellor may also refer you to other services for your ongoing clinical care. One example of this is the Hereditary Breast and Ovarian Cancer (HBOC) Family Service which is run at Guy's Hospital and supports individuals who carry a gene mutation in a high risk cancer gene.

For those wanting an insight into genetic counselling, you may wish to access this free online course: <https://coursesandconferences.wellcomegenomecampus.org/our-events/genetic-counselling-online-aug20/>

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