

## What is a Genetic Counselor?

Genetic counselors are medical professionals who act as part of a prenatal care team, including your doctor and other pregnancy care specialists. They are specially trained to discuss the technical and medical aspects of prenatal development, screening, and testing, as well as the social and emotional concerns you may have in pregnancy. This can be a difficult and scary time for many women. Your genetic counselor can help guide you through some of the process.

### *Genetic Counselors Are:*

- Master's level medical professionals
- Certified by the American Board of Medical Genetics (ABMG) and the American Board of Genetic Counseling (ABGC)
- Trained in medical genetics and psychosocial counseling

## Why Would I See A Genetic Counselor in My Pregnancy?

People are referred to a genetic counselor for many reasons. The most common reason is to consider prenatal screening or testing for common problems like Down syndrome or spina bifida. Options for screening and testing have become more complex in recent years and can be very confusing. Your genetic counselor can help you decide what options, if any, are best for you. Another reason a patient may see a genetic counselor is if a problem is seen on ultrasound. Some findings on ultrasound may be associated with a larger group of problems, like a syndrome, others may occur on their own, and others may not affect the baby after birth. Your genetic counselor can discuss options for more testing, care after delivery, and possible risks in future pregnancies. Other reasons a patient may have genetic counseling include exposure to medications in pregnancy or a family history of birth defects or genetic disorders.

### *Common Reasons For A Genetic Counseling Referral*

- Age 35 or Older at Delivery
- Prenatal tests showing an increased risk for Down syndrome, spina bifida, or other problems
- Ultrasound findings
- Family history of a genetic condition or birth defect
- Drug or medication use in pregnancy

## **My Doctor has Recommended that I See a Genetic Counselor. Does That Mean Something is Wrong?**

Usually, when a patient is referred for genetic counseling, there is not a problem with the pregnancy. Most screens and other tests offer normal and reassuring results. If a serious problem is found, however, your genetic counselor will be available to help you through this difficult time.

## **No One in My Family has had a Baby with a Problem. Do I Still Need Genetic Counseling?**

Genetic counselors see patients because of problems in a family, but also for lots of other reasons too. Many prenatal tests are offered to all women in pregnancy, regardless of family history. It is your genetic counselor's job to help you understand the information you are given, so you can make the best decisions for your pregnancy.

## **What Will Happen at My Appointment?**

Most genetic counseling appointments have three parts. First you and your counselor will discuss why you are there and what you hope to get from the visit. Second, your counselor will take a detailed medical history of your family. Finally, based on the reason for your appointment and your family history, you and your counselor will discuss possible screening or testing options that are appropriate for your pregnancy. All of the options discussed with your genetic counselor are optional. It is up to you to decide what is best for you in your pregnancy.

### *The Genetic Counseling Visit*

#### Setting Your Goals

- What are your concerns?
- What do you hope to learn?

#### Family/Pregnancy History

- What screening or testing options are appropriate?

#### Discussion

- Which options are best for you?
- Where do we go from here?

## Genetic Counseling



## **How Can I Get More Information?**

You can call (919)966-2229 to learn more about prenatal genetic counseling at the University of North Carolina – Chapel Hill. To learn more about genetic counseling as a profession, visit [www.nsgc.org](http://www.nsgc.org).

## Helping You Navigate Your Options for Prenatal Diagnosis

