President’s Perspective

Congratulations! As of this writing, you are among 4,244 individuals who can call themselves Certified Genetic Counselors. The workforce continues to expand! With increasing numbers of genetic counselors entering into the workplace, we anticipate that the roles and positions that genetics counselors fill will continue to grow as well. A Workforce Workgroup meeting was held in Chicago with leaders from the five US genetic counseling groups (ABGC, ACGC, AGCPD, ASHG and NSGC) to develop a strategic plan for growing the genetic counselor workforce over the next 3-5 years.

We are excited about this fourth annual newsletter. Each year we present you with ongoing activities. There are several priorities for 2017 that we cannot wait to tell you about. Let’s get started!

Practice Analysis
Every 3-5 years a survey is sent to the ABGC diplomates that questions their roles, specialties and activities that genetic counselors perform in their jobs. The practice analysis is performed to determine if the genetic counseling practice has significantly changed over time. The practice analysis was performed for the first time in 2008, and the second time in 2011. The second analysis was sent to 2,820 diplomates and indicated no significant practice differences. The 2017 practice analysis survey went out to 5,371 genetic counselors earlier this Spring. The results will inform whether changes to the detailed content outline, the document that informs CGC® content for the certification exam, need to be made. If genetic counseling practice has changed significantly from 2011, then the detailed content outline is updated and ultimately questions for the new content will need to be created and validated. The survey results are being analyzed and reviewed for changes. We will report to you any differences that are noted. Stay tuned for this exciting information!

Online Exam Application
While this newsletter is directed to those who have earned their CGC®, we thought you would still be interested to learn about updates to the examination administration. ABGC is consistently working on improving the certification examination process for test takers. Over the last five years, we 1) instituted instant scoring (2013), 2) moved from one testing window to two (2014), 3) updated the practice exam (2015) and 4) significantly reduced examination fees (2016). Starting in March 2017, test applicants (e.g. new graduates who are applying for certification exam, as well as those who recertify by exam) will use the online system to apply and submit documentation. Additionally, program directors will use the online system to verify clinical training and graduation date.

Research Committee
Several legal and regulatory issues have emerged over the last year that are related to Maintenance of Certification (MoC). Several states (AZ, OK, KY, MO, MI (pending), NC (pending)) no longer require physicians to maintain their

Karen Powell, MS, CGC
President, ABGC

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Continuing Education Units (CEU) Standards

Continuing education is essential to maintaining and increasing a genetic counselor's knowledge and skills in a rapidly evolving field. In 2015, ABGC created a CEU Task Force to develop standards by which all educational activities and programs will be measured for appropriateness to use for recertification of certified genetic counselors (CGC®).

The CEU Task Force developed requirements around seven Standards:
1. Educational content
2. Education level
3. Instructional methodology
4. Program format
5. Program planning
6. Continuing education program assessment and evaluation
7. Conflicts of interest

The criteria outlined in the Standards document ensures that category 1 and 2 CEUs are granted for educational activities that reflect the profession's current needs and promote high quality genetic counseling services.

The standards document is designed to guide CEU Providers and Program Planners when developing CEU-eligible activities. In order for ABGC to accept a CEU for recertification, the educational activity or program must meet each standard's criteria. ABGC is working with the National Society of Genetic Counselors (NSGC), the current CEU Provider, in implementing these standards. NSGC will be requiring all activity organizers to adhere to the updated standards for any educational activities and programs occurring on or after April 1, 2017. For more details about each standard, please go to the ABGC website, www.abgc.net.

Board of Directors - Call for Nominations

The ABGC Board of Directors has an opening for one Board member to begin serving a four-year term in January 2018. Nominees should be passionate about the profession, have extensive professional and leadership experience (such as a board member or committee chair in a genetics related organization), and the ability to think and act strategically. If you know a CGC® who would be an ideal candidate to represent your profession, please nominate her or him by sending an email to info@ABGC.net. It would be ideal to discuss this nomination with the individual before submitting, but this is not required. The Executive Office will follow up with him/her regarding their interest.

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certification as a requirement for licensure, and 19 others (CA, FL, GA, IN, IA, MA, MI, NJ, NY, NC, OH, OK, PA, SC, TX, VA, WA, WV, and WI) have state medical society resolutions restricting the use of certification. Since legislation that occurs in the MD world, can have copycat legislation in other realms, this has become a concern for ABGC. As a result, ABGC has created a Research committee to look at promoting studies that show the importance of Certified Genetic Counselors. Please contact Adam Buchanan, abbuchanan@geisinger.edu, the ABGC board liaison to this committee, if you are interested in serving on this committee or have study ideas upon which you would like to collaborate. A grant application process is currently in development and will be available online later this year.

Out with the old, in with the new... website, that is:

In December a task force met to discuss the creation and implementation of a new ABGC website. The task force is working closely with Kellen, our global association management company, to perform a complete overhaul of the website, including improvements to the Diplomate Directory, website messaging and functionality. The goal of the meeting was to set up a messaging structure to create the framework of the site. The website will not only be the go-to place to learn about upcoming priorities for ABGC, but also to find strategic documents, and task force information. We anticipate the launch of the website will be in September, just prior to the AEC in Columbus, OH. Once the website is up and running, you will need to log in and update your records.
Experience DNA testing done right

At Counsyl, we strive to put patients first, put clinicians in control, and put costs in their place. We’re committed to helping patients understand their DNA and how it can inform important health decisions.

Whether it’s starting a family or evaluating risk for cancer, Counsyl’s DNA tests provide patients with early awareness about genetic conditions, so they can live informed and prepare for the future.

Family Prep Screen
Expanded Carrier Screen
Maximize the detection of at-risk couples

Informed Pregnancy Screen
Non-invasive Prenatal Screen
Deliver actionable results for more patients with a low (0.1%) no call rate

Inherited Cancer Screen
Hereditary Cancer Screen
Identify patients at elevated risk for inherited cancer

Learn more about Counsyl DNA testing at counsyl.com/gc
Certification Exam Performance

The 2016 certification examination performance data was presented at the ABGC Business Meeting at the National Society of Genetic Counselors Annual Education Conference in Seattle, WA. In 2016, 343 candidates took the board examination. Of those, 284 were first-attempt examinees, 54 were repeat examinees, and 5 recertified by exam. Examinees’ year of graduation ranged from 1995-2016. Of the 343 examinees, 291 graduated in 2015 and 2016 (84%). In this cycle, the overall pass rate was 84%, suggesting an increase rate in overall pass rates since 2010. Consistent with observations over the past six years, the first-time pass rate was higher than the overall passing rate (88% versus 84%). In previous cycles, the passing rate for first-time candidates who took the exam the year after they graduated was not different from the passing rate for first-time candidates who took the exam in the year they graduated.–In 2016 we observed that first-attempt examinees who waited a year before taking the exam had a pass rate of greater than 90%, compared to 85% for 2016 graduates who took the exam on that same year.

The ABGC Certification Examination is offered twice a year, in February and August, to individuals who have earned active candidate status and to Diplomates recertifying by exam. The passing rate is determined by comparing individual scores to pre-determined standards of minimal competence in the genetic counseling field. More information on the certification exam performance can be found on the ABGC website (http://www.abgc.net), Exam section, Examination Performance Data sub-section.

Exam Eligibility Taskforce Updates

Currently, only candidates who have graduated from an Accreditation Council for Genetic Counseling (ACGC) accredited genetic counseling training program are allowed to apply to sit for the ABGC certification exam. In 2015, ABGC formed the Examination Eligibility Taskforce (EETF) and charged them with evaluating the current exam eligibility requirements and looking into expanding examination eligibility through additional pathways.

The EETF completed their report in September of 2016. This report contained seven recommendations which were reviewed at the Fall 2016 ABGC Board of Directors meeting. The recommendations included: adding an attestation statement regarding adherence to ethics/ethical practice as part of the examination application process; developing an application and review process that allows accrediting bodies to apply for recognition by ABGC; developing a pathway for internationally trained genetic counselors who are recognized or certified by an agency approved by ABGC to sit for the examination; and conducting periodic exam eligibility evaluations.

The ABGC Board of Directors voted to implement these recommendations and requested that members of the EETF develop the application processes that will allow internationally certified or registered genetic counselors to apply for eligibility for the ABGC certification examination. This will lead to opening an additional exam eligibility pathway for genetic counselors who hold a current international registration/certification from an ABGC approved international accrediting body (e.g. European Board of Medical Genetics, Human Genetics Society of Australasia). The rollout of this new pathway is expected within the next six months.
Learn About New Board Members
Ana Morales and Adam Buchanan

Ana Morales, MS, CGC®, LCGC works as a Clinical Associate Professor at The Ohio State University in Columbus, Ohio where she specializes as a cardiovascular genetic counselor. At Ohio State, she teaches and provides clinical supervision for genetic counseling graduate students, as well as helps support and lead genetic counseling research projects. Ana would like to thank every Diplomate who participated in the 2016 ABGC election, and especially to those who chose her to work with the board in their mission, aimed at protecting the public through solid certification standards and promoting the value of certified genetic counselors.

Ana has made volunteering for her profession as a priority. Besides her involvement with ABGC, she also volunteers for the National Society of Genetic Counselors, currently, for the Mentor Program, the Annual Conference Program Committee, the Practice Guidelines Committee, and the Media Panel. She chose volunteer work that fulfills her commitment to developing knowledge and promoting high standards in genetic counseling.

As much as she loves her profession, her favorite part of the day is time at the dinner table with her husband and 13 year old son. When work is done, they have fun around Columbus, host dinner parties, go on road trips, and visit the rest of their family, most of whom live in Puerto Rico. Ana looks forward to using her professional and personal background to help shape and execute ABGC’s mission, while continuing to do work that makes the CGC® credentials a matter of pride.

Adam Buchanan, MS, MPH, LCGC, from Hillsborough, NC, began a four-year term on January 1, 2017. Adam, an ABGC diplomate since 2005, is an assistant professor in the Geisinger Genomic Medicine Institute. He began his career as a health behavior expert on cancer screening studies before finding genetic counseling. After completing his genetic counseling training, Adam worked for ten years as a genetic counselor and research associate in the Duke Cancer Institute, where he built clinical expertise in cancer genetics and pursued research on access to care and behavioral outcomes of genetic counseling. In his current position at Geisinger, he is developing a research program on outcomes of returning medically actionable genomic results to unselected individuals.

Adam has been an active volunteer in the genetic counseling profession, including serving as chair of the NSGC Practice Guidelines Committee, a member of the Journal of Genetic Counseling editorial board, and item writer for the ABGC certification examination. He is looking forward to joining another group of talented, dedicated genetic counselors on the Board, and to helping certified genetic counselors ensure that our training and certification evolve to meet new healthcare needs while maintaining high standards of quality and accessibility.

From the MAILBAG

Q: If I recertify before the end of my recertification year, can I use CEUs earned after I recertify for my next recertification cycle?

Any CEUs earned during the recertification year can only be used for current recertification. You may start collecting CEUs for your next recertification cycle starting January 1 of the following year, which is when your new certification cycle begins. For example, if you complete your re-certification on July 15, 2017, any CEUs/PACS you receive between July 15, 2017 and the beginning of your new certification cycle on January 1, 2018 will not count toward your next recertification.

Q: When are certification maintenance fees (CMF) due and reminders sent?

Invoices are emailed at the end of January, with fees due in February. Diplomates can pay online at www.abgc.net or via check. All owed fees must be paid at the time of recertification.

Q: How do I request proof of my certification for state licensure or my employer? What if I need proof of certification to go to multiple states?

To request a letter from ABGC verifying your CGC® credential, you may submit a Request for Credential Verification form (found at www.abgc.net – Resources & Links/Information & Forms) to the ABGC Executive Office. You can list multiple states on the form if needed. ABGC keeps the current email and mailing addresses for each state licensure office – you do not need to enter that information on the form. There is no charge for this service if your ABGC maintenance fee is current. If you have not paid your fee, or your employer or another third party is making the request, there is a $40 fee. The verification letters take approximately 7-10 business days to process. If an exam score report is needed for verification, please refer to the form in the Examination Bulletin or contact the Executive Office. There is a $25 fee. It is against ABGC policy to release scores or send score reports to anyone other than the candidate.
The 2017 Genetic Counseling Practice Analysis

A critical component of a rigorous certification process is the periodic conduct of a Practice Analysis (PA). The PA is intended to define the practice of genetic counseling by describing the behaviors needed for a minimally competent provider to safely and effectively practice. Results of the PA then directly inform the development of the Detailed Content Outline (DCO), which then informs the content of the certification exam. This process enhances the validity of the certification exam by ensuring that the content of the exam directly reflects the practice of genetic counseling. The ABGC conducted its first PA in 2008 and then repeated it in 2011 to assess changes in practice. It is standard practice to conduct a new PA approximately every five years. Given the rapid technological changes that affect the provision of genetic counseling, it is important that ABGC conducts another PA this year.

The PA involves a survey of practicing genetic counselors in which respondents are asked to consider a comprehensive list of tasks that might be performed in the course of doing their work. Responses indicate both the proportion of genetic counselors that perform each task as well as the perceived importance that genetic counselors place on that task. The list is developed and vetted by members of a Practice Analysis Advisory Committee made up of a representative group of ABGC certified genetic counselors. If you completed the PA in 2011, this year’s survey likely looked somewhat familiar. However, there were some key updates made based on relatively recent changes in genetic counselors’ roles. The current PA is intended to capture the work of those who counsel clients as well as those who are not working in direct counseling roles. As the PA is essential to the integrity of our certification process, thank you to every practicing genetic counselor who participated in the process.

Recertification Reminders

Recertification demonstrates your commitment to lifelong learning and protects the public by ensuring that knowledge and skills necessary for competent practice are maintained. ABGC certified genetic counselors have two paths to recertification: 1) examination and 2) continuing education. If you are recertifying by examination, you may sit for the exam anytime within the period of your current time-limited certification. If you are recertifying through the continuing education pathway, you must accrue the required number of continuing education units through a combination of Category 1 CEUs, Category 2 CEUs, and Professional Activity Credits (PACs).

While comprehensive details regarding recertification are available on the ABGC website, several key points and new developments are highlighted here for your convenience.

Clarification of the use of Category 2 CEUs and PACs

Our recertification materials were revised for clarification in 2016 based on questions received from several Diplomates. All Diplomates were informed about this clarification in the summer of 2016. At least 60% (e.g. 7.5 Category 1 CEUs in a 5 year certificate) of continuing education units must come from Category 1 CEUs. The remaining 40% (e.g. 5 CEUs in a 5 year certificate) may come from a combination of Category 1 CEUs, Category 2 CEUs, and/or PACs. Please note that no more than 20% (2.5 CEUs in a 5 years certificate) of the CEUs in any period may come from PACs.

Online Recertification Tools

The online recertification system allows you to enter and track continuing education activities and PACs as you earn them. This can mean the end to last minute hunting through files to find CEU documentation. In an effort to make the recertification process as seamless as possible, the system also allows for completion of the entire recertification process online. Just login to the ABGC site and click “Recertify.”

Additional Points for Consideration

- There is no fee for recertification, but remember that you must be current with your annual certification maintenance fees (CMFs).
- The ABGC website has all materials that you need in the “Recertify” section.
- Keep records for each continuing education activity in case you are randomly selected for an audit.
- When applying for CEUs for your educational activity, be sure to use the most up-to-date forms. The ABGC CEU Taskforce revised the Standards and Guidelines document for program planners to use in developing CEU activities. As of February 1, 2017, all Category 1 and Category 2 CEU applications must be submitted using revised forms available on the NSGC website.

Call for Nominations for the ABGC Board of Directors

You are interested in being considered for the Board of Directors, complete and submit the Personal Statement and Information Form, curriculum vitae (CV), and color photo to the Executive Office. The formal call for nominations and forms will be available on the website by June 2017.
New comprehensive test panels providing insights into genetic causes of epilepsy

When a patient presents with epilepsy, the underlying cause is not always clear.

Athena Diagnostics offers a comprehensive panel of clinically relevant genes to help treat your epilepsy patients. Our team of neurologists and genetic counselors have researched and selected 234 genes associated with primary epilepsy as secondary disorders known to include seizures. Subpanels are constructed based on clinical presentations (phenotype). NGS and CNV analysis is included for all 234 genes, and CMA confirmation is performed if a CNV is found.

For more information and to download your free Epilepsy Testing Catalog, visit AthenaDiagnostics.com/Epilepsy.

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NCCA Corner – Understanding what it means to have an accredited examination program

ABGC's exam development, administration and scoring processes are accredited by the National Commission for Certifying Agencies (NCCA). This accreditation ensures that ABGC follows the gold standard in measurement. Gaining accreditation is quite an accomplishment and one that is always ongoing with regards to compliance. This article will highlight one of the NCCA standards and provide some context on how ABGC's activities demonstrate compliance as well as continued improvement.

**Standard 7: Program Policies**

The certification program must establish, enforce, and periodically review certification policies and procedures related to certification and challenges to certification decisions.

**Essential Elements:**

A. A certification program must enforce and periodically review policies and procedures for determining an applicant, candidate, or certificant’s compliance with established certification requirements.

B. In establishing the eligibility requirements for taking the certification examination, the certification board must provide a rationale, either qualitative and/or quantitative, for all eligibility requirements.

With the formation of the ABGC Examination Eligibility Taskforce (EETF), ABGC demonstrated compliance with Standard 7, Essential Element A and B above by ensuring that the eligibility requirements for sitting for the board examination are still relevant and appropriate for the current environment. The EETF documented its review of the current eligibility requirements in the final task force report. During that review the EETF reviewed the components that constitute minimum competence (as reported in the Institute for Credentialing Excellence (ICE) Eligibility Criteria Report, compared the current eligibility criteria to the ICE elements and determined that qualifications are sufficient and congruent with the elements.

Additionally, ABGC reviews its policies and procedures on a periodic basis to ensure that they are still relevant, clear, fair and equitable for all candidates. Don’t hesitate to contact the Executive Office if you have any questions around NCCA accreditation or the Institute for Credentialing Excellence.

Advertisement Options Available in 2018!

Would you like to place an ad in this newsletter? Advertising space is available. Advertising packages will be available in early 2018.

To make an inquiry, please contact Dana VanMeerhaeghe, ABGC Associate Executive Director, at dana@ABGC.net.