



Practice-Based Competencies

An entry-level genetic counselor must demonstrate the practice-based competencies listed in this document to successfully manage a genetic counseling case before, during, and after a clinic visit or session. Therefore, the didactic and clinical training components of a curriculum must support the development of competencies that are categorized into the following domains: (I) Communication Skills; (II) Critical-Thinking Skills; (III) Interpersonal, Counseling, and Psychosocial Assessment Skills; and (IV) Professional Ethics and Values. Some competencies may pertain to more than one domain. These domains represent practice areas that define the activities of a genetic counselor. The paragraph below each competency elaborates on skills necessary for achievement of the competency. These elaborations should assist program faculty in curriculum planning, development, and program and student evaluation.

DOMAIN I: COMMUNICATION SKILLS

1. Can establish a mutually agreed upon genetic counseling agenda with the client

The student is able to contract with a client or family throughout the relationship; explain the genetic counseling process; elicit expectations, perceptions and knowledge; and establish rapport through verbal and non-verbal interaction.

2. Can elicit an appropriate and inclusive family history

The student is able to construct a complete pedigree; demonstrate proficiency in the use of pedigree symbols, standard notation, and nomenclature; structure questioning for the individual case and probable diagnosis; use interviewing skills; facilitate recall for symptoms and pertinent history by pursuing a relevant path of inquiry; and in the course of this interaction, identify family dynamics, emotional responses, and other relevant information.

3. Can elicit pertinent medical information including pregnancy, developmental, and medical histories

The student is able to apply knowledge of the inheritance patterns, etiology, clinical features, and natural history of a variety of genetic disorders, birth defects, and other conditions; obtain appropriate medical histories; identify essential medical records and secure releases of medical information.

4. Can elicit a social and psychosocial history

The student is able to conduct a client or family interview that demonstrates an appreciation of family systems theory and dynamics. The student is able to listen effectively, identify potential strengths and weaknesses, and assess individual and family support systems and coping mechanisms.

5. Can convey genetic, medical, and technical information including but not limited to diagnosis, etiology, natural history, prognosis, and treatment/management of genetic conditions and/or birth defects to clients with a variety of educational, socioeconomic, and ethno-cultural backgrounds

The student is able to demonstrate knowledge of clinical genetics and relevant medical topics by effectively communicating this information in a given session.

- 6. Can explain the technical and medical aspects of diagnostic and screening methods and reproductive options including associated risks, benefits, and limitations**

The student is able to demonstrate knowledge of diagnostic and screening procedures and clearly communicate relevant information to clients. The student is able to facilitate the informed-consent process. The student is able to determine client comprehension and adjust counseling accordingly.
- 7. Can understand, listen, communicate, and manage a genetic counseling case in a culturally responsive manner**

The student can care for clients using cultural self-awareness and familiarity with a variety of ethno-cultural issues, traditions, health beliefs, attitudes, lifestyles, and values.
- 8. Can document and present case information clearly and concisely, both orally and in writing, as appropriate to the audience**

The student can present succinct and precise case-summary information to colleagues and other professionals. The student can write at an appropriate level for clients and professionals and produce written documentation within a reasonable time frame. The student can demonstrate respect for privacy and confidentiality of medical information.
- 9. Can plan, organize, and conduct public and professional education programs on human genetics, patient care, and genetic counseling issues**

The student is able to identify educational needs and design programs for specific audiences, demonstrate public speaking skills, use visual aids, and identify and access supplemental educational materials.

DOMAIN II: CRITICAL-THINKING SKILLS

- 10. Can assess and calculate genetic and teratogenic risks**

The student is able to calculate risks based on pedigree analysis and knowledge of inheritance patterns, genetic epidemiologic data, and quantitative genetics principles.
- 11. Can evaluate a social and psychosocial history**

The student demonstrates understanding of family and interpersonal dynamics and can recognize the impact of emotions on cognition and retention, as well as the need for intervention and referral.
- 12. Can identify, synthesize, organize and summarize pertinent medical and genetic information for use in genetic counseling**

The student is able to use a variety of sources of information including client/family member(s), laboratory results, medical records, medical and genetic literature and computerized databases. The student is able to analyze and interpret information that provides the basis for differential diagnosis, risk assessment and genetic testing. The student is able to apply knowledge of the natural history and characteristics/symptoms of common genetic conditions.
- 13. Can demonstrate successful case management skills**

The student is able to analyze and interpret medical, genetic and family data; to design, conduct, and periodically assess the case management plan; arrange for testing; and follow up with the client, laboratory, and other professionals. The student should demonstrate understanding of legal and ethical issues related to privacy and confidentiality in communications about clients.

14. Can assess client understanding and response to information and its implications to modify a counseling session as needed

The student is able to respond to verbal and nonverbal cues and to structure and modify information presented to maximize comprehension by clients.

15. Can identify and access local, regional, and national resources and services

The student is familiar with local, regional, and national support groups and other resources, and can access and make referrals to other professionals and agencies.

16. Can identify and access information resources pertinent to clinical genetics and counseling

The student is able to demonstrate familiarity with the genetic, medical and social-science literature, and on-line databases. The student is able to review the literature and synthesize the information for a case in a critical and meaningful way.

DOMAIN III: INTERPERSONAL, COUNSELING, AND PSYCHOSOCIAL ASSESSMENT SKILLS

17. Can establish rapport, identify major concerns, and respond to emerging issues of a client or family

The student is able to display empathic listening and interviewing skills and address clients' concerns.

18. Can elicit and interpret individual and family experiences, behaviors, emotions, perceptions, and attitudes that clarify beliefs and values

The student is able to assess and interpret verbal and non-verbal cues and use this information in the genetic counseling session. The student is able to engage clients in an exploration of their responses to risks and options.

19. Can use a range of interviewing techniques

The student is able to identify and select from a variety of communication approaches throughout a counseling session.

20. Can provide short-term, client-centered counseling and psychological support

The student is able to assess clients' psychosocial needs and recognize psychopathology. The student can demonstrate knowledge of psychological defenses, family dynamics, family theory, crisis-intervention techniques, coping models, the grief process, and reactions to illness. The student can use open-ended questions; listen empathically; employ crisis intervention skills; and provide anticipatory guidance.

21. Can promote client decision-making in an unbiased, non-coercive manner

The student understands the philosophy of non-directiveness and is able to recognize his or her values and biases as they relate to genetic counseling issues. The student is able to recognize and respond to dynamics, such as counter transference, that may affect the counseling interaction.

22. Can establish and maintain inter- and intradisciplinary professional relationships to function as part of a health care delivery team

The student behaves professionally and understands the roles of other professionals with whom he or she interacts.

DOMAIN IV: PROFESSIONAL ETHICS AND VALUES

23. Can act in accordance with the ethical, legal, and philosophical principles and values of the profession

The student is able to recognize and respond to ethical and moral dilemmas arising in practice and seek assistance from experts in these areas. The student is able to identify factors that promote or hinder client autonomy. The student demonstrates an appreciation of the issues surrounding privacy, informed consent, confidentiality, real or potential discrimination, and other ethical/legal matters related to the exchange of genetic information.

24. Can serve as an advocate for clients

The student can understand clients' needs and perceptions and represent their interests in accessing services and responses from the medical and social service systems.

25. Can introduce research options and issues to clients and families

The student is able to critique and evaluate the risks, benefits, and limitations of client participation in research; access information on new research studies; present this information clearly and completely to clients; and promote an informed-consent process.

26. Can recognize his or her own limitations in knowledge and capabilities regarding medical, psychosocial, and ethno-cultural issues and seek consultation or refer clients when needed

The student demonstrates the ability to self-assess and to be self-critical. The student demonstrates the ability to respond to performance critique and integrates supervision feedback into his or her subsequent performance. The student is able to identify and obtain appropriate consultative assistance for self and clients.

27. Can demonstrate initiative for continued professional growth

The student displays a knowledge of current standards of practice and shows independent knowledge-seeking behavior and lifelong learning.