

Hiring a Genetic Counselor in a Lean Labor Market

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There is no doubt that having a board-certified genetic counselor on your cancer care team is a great asset, but I often hear about how difficult it is to hire one. Interest in the field is high. The American Board of Genetic Counselors recently announced that the number of board-certified genetic counselors in the United States has surpassed 5,000—a huge milestone for the field. According to the National Society of Genetic Counselors' (NSGC) recent Professional Status Survey, approximately one-half of genetic counselors describe themselves as specializing in cancer genetics.¹ Many new genetic counseling training programs have been created in recent years, and the number of genetic counselors in the United States is expected to grow 29 percent by 2026.² Given the demand for their skills and the competitive market, genetic counselors can afford to be selective in their employment choices. Hospitals and clinics must therefore be creative in their recruiting efforts and offer competitive packages. To enhance your chances of being able to hire a well-qualified genetic counselor, consider the following:

- **Salary.** The NSGC survey provides an overview of the salaries of genetic counselors,¹ but just consider what the hospitals around you are offering potential employees. Laboratories and companies that provide remote services may be hiring genetic counselors at higher salaries. Considering only regional or clinical positions may lead you to offer noncompetitive packages. Keep in mind that most genetic counselors want to work in a clinical setting; those who leave the clinic report that it is the thing they miss most.³ It is certainly the reason most of us went into the field in the first place.

- **Advancement and leadership opportunities.** Acceptance into training programs is highly competitive, so those who are accepted tend to have strong leadership skills and are creative, driven, and resilient. Historically, genetic counselors have had to create their own positions, and they have developed the skills they need as they go. Use those traits to your advantage and offer your genetic counselors opportunities to grow and lead—they will be happier for it.
- **Work environment.** One of the most common reasons genetic counselors cite for leaving a job is a poor work environment in which they don't feel supported or valued.³ Demonstrate that you value such employees by enabling them to attend educational meetings, treating them as the mid-level providers they are (and not, for example, expecting them to schedule their own patients), and offering flexible hours.

Smaller cancer programs should not discount being able to hire a genetic counselor of their own. Consider creating a part-time or flexible position, sharing a full-time position with another facility in your network via telegenetics, sharing a genetic counselor with another specialty (e.g., oncology and prenatal), or giving your genetic counselor additional responsibilities, such as laboratory utilization management or a leadership role.

Pro Tips

- The best time of year to hire a genetic counselor is late fall/early winter, when genetic counseling students who will graduate in May begin their job searches.
- Be prepared to conduct a national search,

including covering expenses to interview and relocate.

- Advertise on the job board hosted by the NSGC (nsgc.org).
- Consider purchasing e-blast advertisements from NSGC and/or the American Board of Genetic Counselors (abgc.net). Job boards are for those looking for a job, but you may be able to entice someone who was not otherwise looking to make a change.
- Create descriptive recruitment material and make sure that it adequately reflects the job and its requirements.
- Highlight the advantages of working for your organization. For example, can you pay for one or two continuing education meetings per year? Assume membership dues for a national organization? Offer work-from-home days or flexible hours? These are relatively low-cost perks, but they are highly valued by employees.
- Offer a bonus or student loan assistance.
- Be patient! ☐

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References

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3. Cohen SA, Tucker ME. Movement of genetic counselors from clinical to non-clinical positions: identifying driving forces. *J Genet Couns*. 2018;27(4):792-799.