

The Clinical Doctorate in Genetic Counseling: Assessing the Attitudes and Preferences of Program Directors

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Background: Genetic counseling is an allied health profession which is considering a transition from an entry level master's degree to a clinical doctorate (CD). This study explored the attitudes of genetic counseling training program directors (PDs) toward such a transition.

Methods: 31 North American PDs were invited to complete an online survey and a follow-up telephone interview.

Results: 23/31 (74%) PDs completed the survey and 10 PDs also completed an interview. PDs were split on the issue of transitioning to a CD (43% in favor, 29% against, and 28% undecided). They disagreed about whether the transition would lead to higher salaries (29% yes, 38% no, and 33% unsure) or increased professional recognition (40% yes, 40% no, and 20% unsure). However, the majority (65%) thought a CD would help genetic counselors to obtain faculty positions. If the field transitions to a CD, 58% of the PDs thought their program would convert, 37% were unsure and 5% would shut down. Interestingly, 60% of PDs with a master's degree would convert to a CD themselves, 13% would not, and 27% were not sure. Themes identified in interview data included 1) implications for the profession 2) institution-specific considerations 3) perception of the unknown, and 4) transition preferences.

Conclusions: Opinions of genetic counseling training PDs regarding the possible transition to the CD are quite variable.