

Genetic Counselors' Laboratory Experiences: Perspectives from Recent Graduates

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Background: Laboratory genetic counseling is a specialty that has become more common since the inception of the genetic counseling field, especially for non-clinical genetic counselors. However, the laboratory experience requirements for accredited training programs as outlined by the American Board of Genetic Counseling (ABGC) are non-specific and allow freedom for the types of experiences that programs can include in their curriculum. It is unknown what types of laboratory experiences genetic counselors view as the most valuable and which ones are correlated with a higher feeling of preparedness.

Methods: An online survey was implemented, which included four sections: background information, demographics, laboratory experiences, and interest in and preparedness for laboratory genetic counseling.

Results: Most genetic counselors had observations and single course-related opportunities. A minority had more extensive training such as rotations or internships. Experiences rated as very valuable were rotations or internships, work experiences, and short courses at a diagnostic laboratory. Experiences rated as valuable were prior work experience, course work or projects, a laboratory methods course, and observations. Preparedness to work in a laboratory genetic counseling position was correlated with prior work experience, a rotation or internship, or current or past positions involving laboratory genetic counseling responsibilities. Individuals who did not feel adequately trained in laboratory counseling wished they had more exposure to laboratory genetic counselors, more practice interpreting laboratory results, practice in drafting reports and other hands-on experiences, more training in laboratory methodologies, and more classroom education.

Conclusions: Training programs should consider offering laboratory rotations, a laboratory methods course, or a laboratory short-course.