

**Emerging Genetic Counselor Roles within the
Biotechnology and Pharmaceutical Industries:
*As Industry Interest Grows in Rare Genetic Disorders,
How are Genetic Counselors Joining the Discussion?***

Tessa Field, Stephanie Jo Brewster, Meghan Towne, MaryAnn W. Campion
Boston University School of Medicine, Boston, Massachusetts

Traditionally, the biotechnology and pharmaceutical industry (BPI) has focused drug development at the mass-market level, targeting common medical issues such as high-cholesterol, high blood pressure, and arthritis. However, a recent trend has been the development of therapies for orphan or rare disorders including many genetic disorders.

Developing treatments for genetic disorders requires an understanding of the needs of the community and translating genomic information to clinical and non-clinical audiences. The core skills of genetic counselors (GCs) include a deep knowledge of genetics and ability to communicate complex information to a broad audience, making GCs a choice fit for this shift in drug development.

We identified 26 GCs working in BPI in the United States; 79% work for companies focusing on rare disorders. While GC positions in BPI are growing—57% of respondents were the first GC in their role—they continue to utilize core genetic counseling competencies in BPI roles. Satisfaction was high among GCs in BPI, especially in areas traditionally reported as less satisfying on the National Society for Genetic Counselors Professional Status Survey: salary and advancement opportunities. BPI's growing interest in rare disorders represents a career opportunity for GCs, while simultaneously addressing historic areas of dissatisfaction and meeting BPI's communication needs.