

Forging a New Path: Emerging Roles for Genetic Counselors in the Insurance Industry

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To better understand the challenges the insurance industry faces as use of genetic testing expands; to explore how genetic counselors are meeting or could meet those needs; and to assess whether a career in the insurance industry might offer professional advantages for genetic counselors. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with genetic counselors with experience working in the insurance industry. Purposive subject recruitment was conducted via email after identifying potential participants through publically available resources. Interviews were audio recorded, transcribed, coded, and analyzed using grounded theory methodology. Eight board certified genetic counselors were interviewed. Five main domains emerged: 1. Environmental and Infrastructure Trends/Challenges, 2. Genetic Counselor Roles, 3. Genetic Counseling Training and Experience, 4. Patient Impact, and 5. Future Opportunities. The growth and nuances of the genetic testing market was felt to be a major challenge that placed a burden on traditional billing and coverage frameworks. Participants reported having many different responsibilities within the insurance industry to address these challenges and expertise gaps. Respondents described how their genetic counseling training and expertise allowed them to uniquely fill these roles, and to help promote access to appropriate, quality, and lower cost tests for patients. Future opportunities included more genetic counselor involvement throughout the insurance system, increased collaboration of stakeholders, and holistic genetic counseling training. There is a significant role in the insurance industry for genetic counselors. The rapid pace of genetic testing and nuances of the technology present challenges to the traditional structure and expertise of the payer system. Genetic counselors are uniquely positioned to address these obstacles. As there are multiple opportunities for increased genetic counselor involvement in this space, it is important for training programs to adequately prepare students for these opportunities.