

“I am a Genetic Counselor”: A Qualitative Exploration of Field Leaders’ Perceptions of the Title “Genetic Counselor”

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The genetic counseling profession is 50 years old, and is growing and diversifying. Despite this evolving context, no studies have formally explored the continuing relevance or appropriateness of the title “genetic counselor.” We used a qualitative research methodology (interpretive description) to explore this concept among thought leaders within the genetic counseling profession. Using purposive sampling to solicit a diverse range of perspectives and experiences from the genetic counselor community over 3 continents, we conducted semi-structured telephone interviews with 12 genetic counselor thought leaders. Interviews ranged in length from 18 to 50 minutes, and were transcribed verbatim. Two interviews were coded independently by CM and KS, who then discussed until codes were agreed upon, these were then applied to the remaining 10 interviews. Emerging concepts were discussed by the whole team throughout analysis to organize thoughts about these relationships and developing themes. The following themes regarding participants' perceptions of the title “genetic counselor” emerged from the data: 1) others misunderstand “genetic counselor”; 2) the “counselor” part of the title produces complex and conflicting emotions; 3) risks of changing our title outweigh the benefit; 4) we need to own the narrative surrounding our title. These data exploring the implications of our title “genetic counselor” provide insight into how our title may inform current practice and impact future professional development.