

## **Knowledge and Opinions of the Genetic Counseling Profession of High School Students from Underrepresented Backgrounds**

**Joanna Urli, Philip D. Connors, Nadine Channaoui**

Boston University School of Medicine, Boston, Massachusetts

The field of genetic counseling began in the 1960s, with young, Caucasian women quickly comprising the profession's core constituency. The field has made many efforts to increase its racial and ethnic diversity with little success. The 2018 Professional Status Survey, distributed by the National Society of Genetic Counselors reported, that 92% of the respondents identified as Caucasian, 95% as female, and 70% under the age of 40. This qualitative study explored the current career interests of high school students from underrepresented backgrounds as well as their understanding of and thoughts about the genetic counseling profession. Sixteen semi-structured interviews were performed with high school students from the Boston Preparatory Charter School. Major themes emerged reflecting that the participants (1) were science-minded and empathetic, (2) had not heard of genetic counseling but were interested in learning more about it, and (3) provided perspectives different from those historically over-represented in the genetic counseling workforce. Implications for genetic counselors include the need for improved recruitment strategies accessible to individuals of underrepresented backgrounds who might be interested in the profession and the importance of acknowledging that valuable contributions and improvements to the field could be made by such individuals. Future studies could encompass a larger sample size; explore the interests, opinions, and perspectives of high school students with minority identities other than racial and/or ethnic minority; or assess the success of current or new recruitment methods.