



ABGC *Perspectives* Article  
February 2012 Deadline

## **A New Accrediting Body Emerges** ABGC Board of Directors

As genetic counseling has grown as a profession, our accrediting and credentialing body needs to evolve. Recently, at the ABGC Annual Business meeting, held at the 2011 NSGC AEC, ABGC announced the formation of a separate accrediting body. This article will discuss this change and provide a information to why the Board has decided to separate, the current status of the separation, and the goals for the future.

### ***Why have two separate boards?***

The Board of Directors was advised several years ago by our legal counsel that it is a conflict of interest for the certifying body to also accredit training programs. The conflict exists because the Board requires that examinees must graduate from an ABGC accredited training program in order to qualify for the examination, and this same board develops the examination and sets the standards of training. The currently-operating ABGC board took several measures that help to ameliorate this conflict while we planned long-term for a more formal separation.

First, in 1996 when the Board began to accredit training programs the Board of Directors split, so that five members address in detail matters of accrediting training programs and five members matters of credentialing. In subsequent years, the board formed a separate examination committee that manages the development of the examination items and scoring procedures and drafts test forms. Finally, the board formed a separate accreditation review committee that is responsible for reviewing the program applications for accreditation and advising the BOD, and a task force to give recommendations on a revision to the standards of accreditation. The board formed these committees not only to help ameliorate the conflict, but also to allow the five member accreditation committee members to begin planning both operationally and fiscally for a separate accrediting body. These actions all help to defer the conflict, but they do not completely eliminate it. Thus, the BOD is actively engaged in planning and implementing a separation.

### ***Why is it important to have a certifying and accrediting body?***

As a healthcare profession evolves, recognition of a standard of practice also evolves. In order to legally assure that the genetic counseling profession was a recognized profession within the healthcare field, there had to be a measure of competence that defined a competent professional. In defining a competent genetic counselor, the profession had to have an objective measure of practitioners (i.e., the certifying examination) and minimum training standards (i.e., accreditation of programs). Establishing these components allowed (and continues to allow) us to define and

protect our scope of practice through state licensure, federal and payer recognition. Establishing all of these components also protects the public, consumers, patients and healthcare facilities from unscrupulous practitioners.

***Where is ABGC in the separation process?***

The Board of Directors approved the separation in October 2010 and moved to establish a task force charged with developing the rules and processes of the new accrediting board. The goal is to separate completely by the first quarter of 2013.

The Transition Task Force (TTF) includes two current ABGC board members, one former board member, and three non-board members who are accredited genetic counselors (two of whom are program directors). These six individuals have been meeting monthly since the end of 2010 to achieve separation by the first quarter 2013 goal. Towards that end, the TTF has established a name for the new board and drafted bylaws that include the defined purpose of the new organization, total number of board members, nomination and election process, and committee structure. The TTF has revised the charges for the accrediting committees and has looked very closely and diligently at the financial structure for the new agency as well. Financial stability is of the utmost importance in setting the foundation for the new agency. The Board appreciates that the current size of the profession and the total number of training programs requires the new board to remain highly dedicated to fiscal responsibility.

Further, the TTF has consulted with legal counsel and will begin working on the paperwork to incorporate this new organization. Filing the federal and state paperwork for incorporation and application for federal tax status may take six months or longer. Because of this delay, the ABGC Board has determined changes to its own bylaws that are needed in order to allow the Accreditation Committee – or as the new organization will be called, the Accreditation Commission for Genetic Counseling (ACGC) –to work independently as soon as March 2012.

***What will this mean for genetic counselors and training programs?***

The split itself will not cause any changes to the credentialing board (which will continue to be named the American Board of Genetic Counseling), credentialing processes, or the examination. The membership of this board will continue to be the diplomats. All decisions about credentialing of genetic counselors will rest with the ABGC.

The ACGC will have a membership that includes the genetic counseling training programs. All decisions about accreditation of genetic counseling training programs will rest with the ACGC.

The Board of Directors is excited about this step as an evolution of our profession. We look forward to the launch of the new organization and will continue to keep you informed along the way.