



Medicare Recognition for Genetic Counselors Continues To Build Momentum in 2023

By Molly Giammarco Ford, MPP, NSGC Senior Manager, Policy & Government Relations

The profession's effort to obtain Medicare-provider status for genetic counselors continues to gain momentum with the recent reintroduction of H.R. 3876, championed by Reps. Adrian Smith (NE-R) and Brian Higgins (NY-D), the Access to Genetic Counselor Services Act and its Senate companion, to be championed by Sens. John Barrasso (WY-R) and Jon Tester (MT-D). The Access to Genetic Counselor Services Act made significant progress in the 117th Congress (2021-2022) by securing 68 bipartisan cosponsors in the House and six in the Senate. Many of these cosponsors have already signed onto the recently reintroduced House bill, and NSGC continues to work toward building upon its co-sponsor list.

Genetic counselors play a key role in NSGC's advocacy efforts through its Advocacy Coordinating Committee (ACC). Each ACC member

represents a geographical region to help engage genetic counselors, patients, and other provider groups to advance the Access to Genetic Counselor Services Act. This engagement includes securing bill support, facilitating virtual and in-person constituent Hill meetings, and liaising between NSGC headquarters and with individuals and organizations across the country on efforts to advance this legislation.

In 2021-2022 alone, the ACC helped coordinate over 260 constituent meetings with House and Senate offices and secured over 400 organizations in support of the Access to Genetic Counselor Services Act. Their work paid off, with the bill generating significant support in the 117th Congress compared to previous years.

NSGC will continue to meet with as many Congressional offices as possible in the 118th Congress to build upon its co-sponsor base

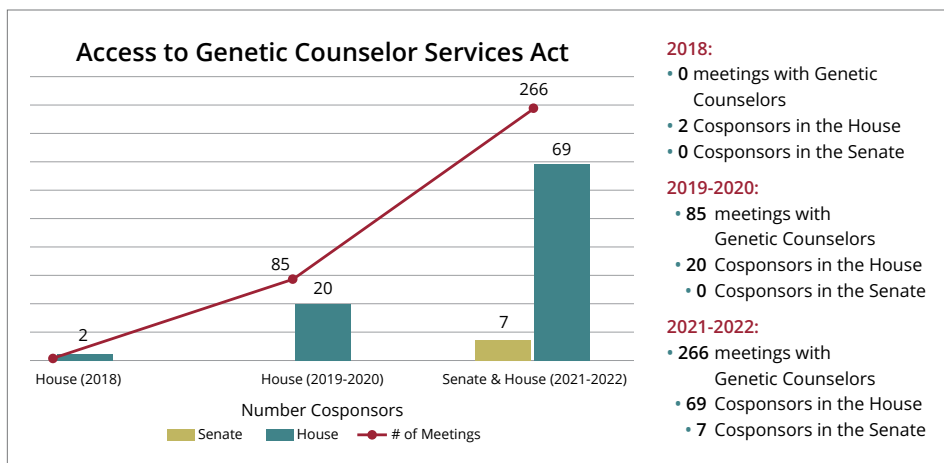


Molly Giammarco Ford, MPP

Regardless of membership status, NSGC invites all genetic counselors to get involved with its advocacy efforts.

and looks to all ABGC Diplomates for help. Efforts to obtain Medicare recognition for genetic counselors is a profession-wide effort that will provide immediate and long-term benefits. Regardless of membership status, NSGC invites all genetic counselors to get involved with its advocacy efforts. By meeting

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- 2018:**
 - 0 meetings with Genetic Counselors
 - 2 Cosponsors in the House
 - 0 Cosponsors in the Senate
- 2019-2020:**
 - 85 meetings with Genetic Counselors
 - 20 Cosponsors in the House
 - 0 Cosponsors in the Senate
- 2021-2022:**
 - 266 meetings with Genetic Counselors
 - 69 Cosponsors in the House
 - 7 Cosponsors in the Senate

President's Perspective: Welcoming New Beginnings

As we embrace the warmth and free-spirited nature of the summer season, I wanted to take a moment to reflect on the passing of spring, a season that's always held a special place in my heart, reminding me of the bittersweet moments of graduation and the anticipation of new beginnings.

During my time at the genetic counseling training program at UT, I eagerly awaited the sight of our students crossing the stage, joining the ranks of genetic counselors. Witnessing their growth and achievements filled me with immense pride and hope for the future of our profession. However, alongside the celebrations, bidding farewell to these talented individuals was always so bittersweet. It was a reminder that time moves swiftly, and we must embrace the moments we share with those around us.

On a personal note, this spring was particularly poignant for me. My son, now a rising junior, and my daughter, a rising freshman, recently ended their academic year, and next year I'll have two kids in high school! It feels like just yesterday they were infants, and I find myself wondering where the years have gone. The passage of time for any parent becomes a poignant reminder of our roles as stewards of the future. We watch our children grow, blossom and embark on their own journeys, leaving us both proud and nostalgic.

This season reminds me of my appreciation for the work we do as genetic counselors. We play an instrumental role in guiding families through pivotal life decisions, offering support and empowering them with knowledge. Just as we witness the transformation of our students during graduation, we have the privilege of witnessing the transformative power of genetic counseling in the lives of our patients. In this issue of the newsletter, we have the honor of highlighting the renowned Michelle Fox, MS, CGC, who has informed many of the power of genetic counseling, including countless worthy students, who she guided toward our career.

Speaking of transformative change, I'd like to address some important updates regarding our website, which serves as a vital platform for information dissemination and resource sharing within our community. To ensure its continued effectiveness and relevance, we have undertaken a comprehensive review and update process. We are dedicated to improving the user experience and enhancing the accessibility of [our website](#), and our team's goal was to create a platform that caters to the diverse needs of our members, enabling seamless interaction and knowledge exchange.

I encourage all of you to explore the updated website and stay connected with us on our social media platforms. Your en-



Sarah Jane Noblin, MS, CGC

gagement helps us create a community of professionals poised to support and uplift each other. Also, be sure to take a moment to update your information in the ABGC Portal — find more info about this later in the newsletter.

Thank you for your unwavering dedication and commitment to the field of genetic counseling. As we move forward, I remain committed to supporting and guiding our board towards even greater accomplishments, and I hope you will as well. Read about our evolving strategic plan in the newsletter. ○

Sincerely,

Sarah Jane Noblin, MS, CGC
President, American Board of
Genetic Counseling



Have you visited the reorganized ABGC website yet?

Check it out for easier access to
the tools and resources you need.



Updated Portal Offers New Benefits for Diplomates

By Heather Rich, MPA, ICE-CCP

Keeping up to date with credentials can be a time-consuming task for genetic counselors, but ABGC is continuing to implement changes to the ABGC Diplomate Portal to make updating profiles simpler.

Since the initial updates in December, many of you have already activated your account and begun the process of uploading your CEUs into your recertification application and processed your certification maintenance fees. Now, you can utilize online licensure verification letter processing directly through the [ABGC Portal](#). It takes two quick steps to select your state and hit send letter. The letter is sent directly from ABGC to your selected state. You will also see a confirmation

and letter in your communications tab of your dashboard.

Additionally, the portal allows you to pay your certification maintenance fees.

Upcoming Changes

One upcoming feature of the portal is SMS text messaging, which allows Diplomates to opt-in to receive text message reminders about important deadlines and updates. Watch your Inbox for more details in the coming weeks.

An eagerly anticipated change ABGC will begin development on in the next few months is creating a bridge between ABGC and the National Society of Genetic Coun-



Heather Rich, MPA, ICE-CCP

selors' (NSGC) Learning Builder platform, which houses their continuing education units (CEU) approval system. By building the bridge, ABGC can automatically upload CEUs and other relevant information from the NSGC system. Once this change is implemented, your profile will update when you attend the NSGC Annual Conference or take other CEU-eligible courses through NSGC. Diplomates will no longer need to download certificates from NSGC and re-upload them to ABGC, making it much easier to keep your profile updated throughout the year.

Have You Updated Your Profile Recently?

Ensuring your portal stays up to date with your newly acquired CEUs and your practice areas can help save you time at year's end. If you aren't sure how to do this, check out this helpful [How-to Guide](#).

If you have any feedback on the portal, don't hesitate to contact ABGC staff at info@abgc.net. The ABGC team is continually looking for ways to improve the technological process for you. ○

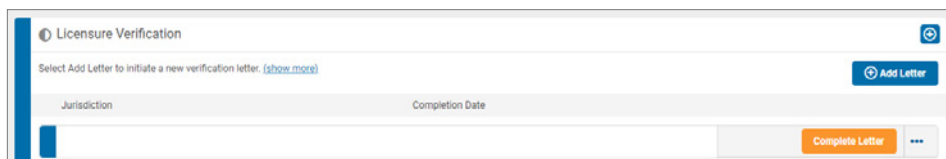


Figure 1: Licensure verification

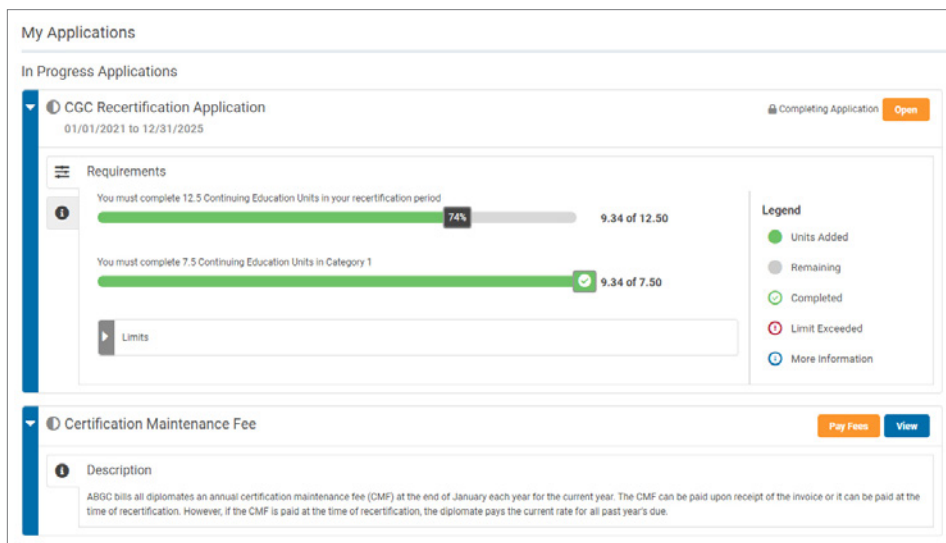


Figure 2: Sample application

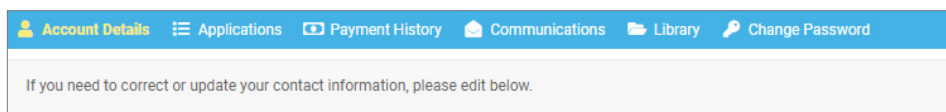


Figure 3: Dashboard

Keep your portal updated and save time at year's end.

ABGC Spotlight: Michelle Fox, MS, CGC

Michelle Fox, MS, CGC, is a giant in genetic counseling. She began her career when the genetic counseling field was young and has since led the way for numerous advancements in helping patients and cementing genetic counseling's role in medicine. These successes were honored in 2022, when she received the National Society of Genetic Counselors Natalie Weissberger Paul National Achievement Award, a well-earned title.

We spoke with Michelle about her career journey and where she sees the field heading next.

What initially drew you to the field of genetic counseling and how did you become a certified genetic counselor?

I started off loving science, and my mom insisted I get certified to teach school. I was a disastrous middle school science teacher. I heard about the genetic counseling program at Sarah Lawrence, and it sounded perfect for me. With luck, I got in. For people who love to talk, this is the perfect field! I spent 35 years at UCLA in clinical research and teaching. Now, I work remotely as a genetic counseling consultant for a company. If you had told me years ago I'd ever work for a lab, I'd say you're crazy. I spent my years calling the labs to complain about the test report, and now I see how difficult it is!

How has the field of genetic counseling evolved during your career, and what changes have you seen in the way genetic information is communicated to patients and families?

When I started, we had very few patients. On the first certification exam, there was no molecular genetics. Now, we are sequencing thousands of genes. Without the supreme court case regarding *BRCA1* and *BRCA2*, none of this lab work would've gone on.

The internet opened up everything for us. We used to have to go to the library and look up a gene. We sometimes knew the syndrome,

because of the signs and symptoms of our patients, but then we looked it up in "Index Medicus" to find additional information. We would find an author of a paper and try to call them. There wasn't another way to do it. Now, there's nothing we can't Google in a few seconds.

I spent my career lowering the barriers to genetic counseling and genetic testing. Genetic counselors are the best-kept secret in medicine. Right now, we've had a sea change. There was a bit of a bubble starting with the industry hiring a lot of genetic counselors and raising salaries. With steady advancements in technology, genetic counselors will always be in demand. We are working for universal screening in the area of cancer. That will create a huge market for genetic counselors. We're going to start doing gene sequencing for newborns. If that happens, the best people to explain all genetic testing results are genetic counselors. We talk all the time about how we can explain this difficult information to anyone at any level. A lot of physicians did not have a lot of genetics in medical school. We are the subject matter experts in genetics.

You have extensive experience in the ethical issues surrounding the provision of genetic services. Could you speak to some of the challenges that arise in the decision-making process for genetic testing?

In the beginning, we had so many issues about how this genetic testing was going to work. Were people going to accept it or not? I think we made a little too much out of it. Ethics are part of every medical practice; it's part of everyone's lives. I think there were a lot of ethical dilemmas when we started thinking about who should take the test and why they should take the test. Is it okay to test children for late onset disease? Is it okay to do a diagnosis during pregnancy for a disease that manifests in your 20s or 30s? Everyone is bound by their ethics and the way they approach that and what the issues are.



Michelle Fox, MS, CGC

In general, education is power and knowledge is power, but people come to you thinking they know what to do. 23&Me is not the same as the testing we do, but it led the way to put genetic testing in everyone's face, and it became common for people to get kits and swab the inside of their cheeks. It's our job to explain what the difference is and what the limitations are. There are limitations for diagnostic genetic testing, too. You must be a knowledgeable consumer.

"On the first certification exam, there was no molecular genetics. Now, we are sequencing thousands of genes."

Could you speak to the importance of mentorship in the field of genetic counseling, and how you have helped to guide and support students in their careers?

We are the best network of healthcare professionals around. You send an email

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with your Congressional offices, securing support from your non-genetic counselor colleagues, or raising awareness of current access barriers to your patients, your efforts make a difference.

Interested in meeting with your Congressional representatives' offices virtually or in person? Simply follow this [link](#) or scan the QR code.



NSGC will reach out to schedule a meeting and provide you with meeting talking points, what to expect, and meeting logistics. An NSGC staff member will also attend the meeting with you, so you are never alone in this effort.

Learn more about [NSGC's federal advocacy effort](#) and ways you can get involved, or contact mford@nsgc.org to learn more about "the Access to Genetic Counselor Services Act." ○

ABGC Spotlight: Michelle Fox, MS, CGC

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to a genetic counselor or a phone call and within a day you get a response. Networking is everything and mentoring is everything, too. In my career, I had amazing mentors. Dr. Steve Cederbaum led the way for me to get a faculty position at UCLA, even though I only had a master's degree.

I worked for years to start a genetic counseling program at UCLA, and we graduated our first class about a year ago. It's very rewarding to see that growth. We recently accepted our third cohort of students. Students are learning up-to-the-minute stuff all the time. All the genetic counselor supervisors are learning, too.

We haven't been able to diversify our profession in general, but we are doing our bit in California. We're reaching out to community colleges on a regular basis to talk about genetic counseling, and we're helping prospective students get their prerequisites by the time they graduate with a four-year degree.

You are currently providing consultation services. Could you discuss some of the unique challenges and opportunities in working in this setting?

It's wonderful. It's the best way I can keep abreast of what is happening in the field. I consult with the regional managers, who are the salespeople for Invitae. I help them with the training, which is very interesting. They are not scientists — they are in sales. It's so exciting, because I'm helping them break down all this very difficult information, so they can explain to the clinicians what the test means and why they would use our laboratory and all the benefits of taking the genetic test.

What has it meant to you to receive the 2022 Natalie Weissberger Paul National Achievement Award?

It meant so much to me to be recognized by my peers and to receive the award and be able to thank all the people who have been my mentors and my dear friends in genetics. When you graduate with a cohort, those genetic counselors are your friends for life. It was so great to be involved over the years with different projects and to be recognized for that work. To have the opportunity at this point in my career to still be in it, I just don't want to stop. I am too passionate about it. There is something new every day ○

"It meant so much to me to be recognized by my peers and to receive the award."

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