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ABGC Spotlight: Alissa Bovee Terry – Engaging Families in Our Non-Clinical Work

Alissa Bovee Terry, ScM, CGC

ALISSA BOVEE TERRY, ScM, CGC, has been a genetic counselor for 17 years, but is constantly learning and adapting in the profession. In this spotlight, she shares with ABGC how her professional role and approach has evolved and changed over the years, and how she has learned to value the role of family engagement in the work of genetic counselors.

What is something unique that you value as a GC?

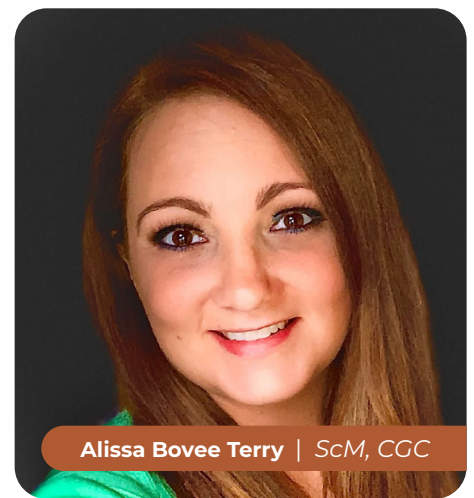
Alissa Bovee Terry, ScM, CGC (ABT):

I have learned so much in the last four years about what family engagement in planning and adapting the systems of care they rely on really looks like. I value how critical it is to hear from and learn from families about what they need, where the gaps are and what changes could best address their challenges. I have learned that this type of engagement takes a lot more time and effort, but the outcome of the work can be exponentially more supportive to the communities it aims to support. I think the importance of family engagement in planning anything that will impact families should be universally recognized in the profession. Several of our close family collaborators often remind us “nothing about us, without us.” I’m so grateful for their partnership in our work.

Can you share your story of becoming a genetic counselor?

ABT: After enjoying sciences in school and having some early formative experiences with the impact of family history, I went to college talking about wanting to be a “genetic engineer,” but I had no idea what that meant. I stuck with the idea of genetics all through college and dabbled in fruit fly laboratory work as well as psychology and ethics courses. I was lucky that my biology career office had a whole binder on genetic counseling, and that I was able to meet with several GCs while I was still in college to understand what GC was.

I remember really struggling during my senior year as I tried to figure out what I would do next, and whether it would be a genetics research type pathway or genetic counseling. Since I felt so undecided, I identified an amazing post-college program at the NIH that ultimately allowed me to get more lab experience while also taking a few classes in the GC program there. Within a few months, it became much clearer to me that my heart was in genetic counseling, and I was able to spend the rest of that year preparing to apply to GC programs with the full support of my lab supervisor/valued mentor/(now) colleague, Dr. Larry Brody. I was fortunate to begin training the next year and met so many amazing



Alissa Bovee Terry | ScM, CGC

supervisors and friends during that time. My three GC classmates, Kate, Meredith and Suzanna, remain some of my favorite people to this day.

Can you describe your evolving role with NYMAC Regional Genetics Network?

ABT: My work with NYMAC started when I was working in a small genetic counseling clinic in Binghamton, NY (Ferre Genetics). My supervisor there had been on the NYMAC Advisory Committee in the past, and in the clinic, we had applied for and received grant funds for a rural telehealth and tele-education project. At that time, telegenetics was still unusual, so after our work on that grant project,

NYMAC invited me to expand my role to become their “telegenetics navigator,” and support providers and clinics that were looking to implement telegenetics. After three years in that role, the NYMAC grant was renewed for a new cycle, and at that time, I became the project manager. In this role, I now oversee all aspects of the NYMAC grant including our community and professional genetics education efforts, local stakeholder teams in each of our 10 jurisdictions, continued telegenetics projects and many aspects of the budget, staffing, workplan and data reporting. Ultimately, I’m responsible for ensuring that our team achieves the goals and objectives we laid out in our grant application on time and within budget.

What is a moment you’ve been proudest of since you began this position?

ABT: Part of our work in NYMAC over the last four years has been to expand access to genetic services in Puerto Rico and the US Virgin Islands. This work has required a very different approach than our work in our eight continental states. Like many things in life, this huge challenge has also been hugely rewarding. When we travelled to the USVI in 2023, we met with many genetics stakeholders. They expressed to us what they felt their key needs were for genetics care in their communities. A few days after we returned, we noticed a grant opportunity that would be able to support and address almost all those concerns,



how the new grant can address their key priorities. We are so hopeful that even though the NYMAC grant will no longer be in place after June 2024, this new funding can continue to address those pressing needs for the communities in the USVI.

How are you involved with Ferre Genetics?

ABT: I am so lucky that Ferre Genetics, and Luba Djurdjinovic, the founder, have been a part of my professional career for almost 20 years. I met with Luba briefly when I was in college nearby to learn about GC as a profession. Years later, when I finished graduate school and moved back to that area, we reconnected, and I was fortunate enough to work in the clinic with her for a year while we lived nearby. After moving again, I was able to continue to see patients remotely for years afterward. Later, the work with Ferre evolved to include work on NYMAC grants, as described above. Today, Ferre Genetics is the administrative arm of the NYMAC grant, so I have the great pleasure of continuing to work with Luba and the

Who has mentored you in your career?

ABT: As I described above, Luba has been a key mentor throughout my career. One of her most valuable lessons to me has been to be adaptable, which proved to be important as my career path changed so much from a clinical role to an eventual project management role. My work with NYMAC has also put me in close collaboration with many other wonderful and insightful people including Dr. Michele Caggana, who works in the NYS NBS program, and Dr. Joann Bodurtha at Johns Hopkins. They have really taught me to trust myself over the last four years as I took on a bigger leadership role. My laboratory mentors, Dr. Brody at NHGRI and Dr. McIntyre at Cornell were also so generous in allowing me to explore “wet lab” research and showing how student trainees can really be meaningfully engaged in genomics work at all stages.

What is your biggest piece of advice for a current genetic counseling student?

ABT: The world of genetic counseling training has changed so much in 20 years. Students now see a huge variety of career paths in front of them. I would encourage them, as my mentors encouraged me, to both be adaptable (because things will change!), and to trust themselves as they navigate their possibly windy road ahead.

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but it was due in less than two weeks. I am so proud that our team was able to support our USVI collaborators in writing and submitting the grant, and we were overjoyed to hear a few months later that they received the funding. Our second trip to USVI in February 2024 allowed us to continue to respond to expressed needs from the community, as well as meet with various stakeholders to help work through

other amazing staff at Ferre Genetics. What I value most about the work with Ferre is Luba’s incredible commitment to adapting her clinical model to meet the changing needs of the rural communities, providers, and patients she reaches. I’ve seen Ferre change and evolve so much in the last 20 years, but never lose its keen focus on expanding access to GC services.

Outside of genetic counseling, what do you enjoy doing for fun?

ABT: When I have free time, I most enjoy travelling with my husband and two kids, ages 12 and 14. We have been lucky to have done a full California tour, a London/Paris/Switzerland trip and a trip to Hawaii in the past year. I also have a ton of fun watching my kids play the many, many sports that they love. ●

Stewarding the Genetic Counseling Profession: A Message From the ABGC Board President

Angie Trepanier, MS, CGC



Angie Trepanier | MS, CGC

I AM VERY honored to have the opportunity to serve as president of the American Board of Genetic Counseling and to represent our nearly 7,000 Diplomates. This year marks my 30th year as a genetic counselor. A lot has changed since I graduated in 1994, to say the least. At that time, cancer genetic counseling was just emerging as a specialty, and most cancer genetic testing was still done under research protocols. In prenatal genetic counseling practice, we were just starting to transition maternal serum screening from the double screen to

the triple screen. Genetic testing was available for just a few hundred genes and was largely driven by phenotype. We were years away from chromosomal microarrays, next generation sequencing and cell-free fetal DNA screening. Investigations into enzyme replacement and gene therapies were in their infancy.

It is really pretty remarkable how rapidly our knowledge and skill base must evolve in this profession. As such, it is critically important that ABGC ensures the CGC credential represents evolving competence in genetic counseling. Since our CGC credential is a requirement of state licensure laws, the stakes are even higher. One of my motivations to serve on the ABGC board of directors was to contribute to efforts to evaluate and refine (as needed) what initial and continuing competence looks like in genetic counseling. A second motivation was to help key people involved, like state licensure boards, institutional credentialing committees and the public, recognize the value of the CGC credential.

But let's be honest, the last 18 months have been challenging for all of us. We made the difficult decision to leave our

previous management company because they were no longer providing the level of service the organization, our candidates and our Diplomates needed. For similar reasons, we made the decision to seek a new testing vendor. In the midst of all of this, we launched an exam based on a new job analysis and content outline. That's a lot of change in a short period of time, and as you may have experienced, despite our best efforts, the transitions were not seamless.

But I am hopeful and confident that you will start to see the benefits of these changes. We are streamlining the processes by which candidates apply to sit for the ABGC Certification Examination and by which Diplomates recertify. Our first exam cycle with our new test vendor, Prometric, in March was very successful. We are working on new ways for Diplomates to demonstrate continued competence (recertification). We are working on several strategies to evaluate and promote inclusive examination processes. Later this year, we will be developing our new strategic plan which will include enhancing diversity, equity, inclusion and justice in all aspects of our work. The ABGC Board and staff are completely committed to supporting all of our candidates and Diplomates and continuing to ensure that the CGC credential is associated with excellence in genetic counseling.

Thank you for the opportunity to serve as your ABGC president. In my years as a CGC, I've seen our profession and the counselors propelling it impact so many lives, and I'm honored to steward the future of the profession alongside the ABGC Board and all our Diplomates. ●

Sincerely,

Angie Trepanier

MS, CGC, ABGC Board President

This year marks my 30th year as a genetic counselor. A lot has changed since I graduated in 1994, to say the least.



ABGC Exam and Practice Innovations: An Update From the Executive Director

Heather Rich, MPA, ICE-CCP

I AM HAPPY to share some updates on the innovations that ABGC has been working on for the past several months.

Looking back on our first exam cycle with our new test delivery partner, Prometric, in March, candidates overwhelmingly had positive experiences while testing. As we expected, working with Prometric enabled us to provide our CGC candidates with the testing experience that we expect.

scoring will be available in real time. Candidates will receive their exam pass/fail status on the screen and receive their official score report via email within 24 hours. Additionally, we automated the Active Candidate Status (ACS) letter request with the portal, so they are electronically generated, streamlining the process and providing the candidate with a copy of that letter for their records. We

I am happy to share some updates on the innovations that ABGC has been working on for the past several months.

A more recent update is the launch of the new CGC exam application on May 1, 2024. This application has been integrated with the ABGC portal where you can find your recertification application and CMF payment. Licensure letter electronic requests are also available via this platform.

With the release of the new application, our focus was to deliver a seamless integration within our test vendor

believe with these new innovations, and by providing in-house customer service to candidates and Diplomates, we will increase satisfaction and clarity with the application process.

Additionally, we're introducing a new practice exam on June 1, 2024. Over 30 new items have been added to this new version, each mapped to the current CGC outline and exam blueprint. One



scheduling and delivery system. Candidates will apply, schedule and manage their applications within our Learning Builder platform without needing to navigate away. Immediate

exciting change is that candidates will now have the opportunity through this practice exam to gain familiarity with the Prometric exam delivery system, meaning they will take the exam within the same



test driver that the CGC exam is delivered. This means candidates will experience the same interface, navigation, tutorials and receive a report detailing the performance by subdomain at the end.

Looking ahead, we are developing an automated process that will electronically process all NSGC-approved CEU activities directly to your ABGC recertification application. We expect this to launch on January 1, 2025, and will share additional updates in the coming months.

Please share these changes and planned changes with those in your workplace or department who may have questions, as well as with exam candidates. Also be sure to acknowledge members of our ABGC committees who have worked so hard to bring these changes about. You'll learn more about what the committees have been working on in the article ["Advancing the Genetic Counseling Profession: Updates From ABGC Committees" \(page 5\)](#). We look forward to sharing another round of committee updates with all Diplomates again in the fall. ●

Sincerely,

Heather Rich, MPA, ICE-CCP

Advancing the Genetic Counseling Profession: Updates From ABGC Committees

ABGC'S COMMITTEES HAVE been hard at work advancing our specialty over the last few months. Hear from committee leadership about their recent accomplishments and what to look forward to soon.



Amy Shikany | MS, CGC, Chair



Katherine Dunn | MS, CGC, Vice-Chair

Certification Exam Committee

In January, the committee met to review the 80+ items that were written for the upcoming August 2024 and February 2025 exam forms. This is an important part of the exam development process that occurs every year as new items are assigned to fill gaps in content areas of need. The CEC reviews every item that was submitted by the item writers

and validates the content, composition, structure and alignment with the CGC content outline; not all items that are written are approved. The edits to this year's items aimed to ensure we are testing the competency mapped to the

The edits to this year's items aimed to ensure we are testing the competency mapped to the content outline and are written to be as inclusive as possible.

content outline and are written to be as inclusive as possible. Over the past several years, a thorough review of all exam items was done through the lens of DEI/J with the goal of creating a more equitable exam for all candidates. New questions are scrutinized around their use of ethnicity, sexuality and gender identity and relationship status.

In May 2024, the committee met to finalize the exam form. Through this process, the committee, along with the assistance of Prometric, conducted a comprehensive review of each item that has been selected. This review ensures that each item has the appropriate statistics to validate the exam.

In addition to finalizing the exam, the CEC is reviewing the current list of references that are used to author the CGC exam items. Committee leadership is working towards providing a condensed list of references to allow candidates and item writers to focus on sources that not only support genetic counseling practice, but are the most important, relevant, and widely accessible.

Practice Exam Committee

In December, the committee met to map the current items to the new content outline, which was created

in August in response to ABGC's 2022 practice analysis, a process conducted to identify current knowledge areas and tasks performed in the genetic counseling practice. ABGC conducts a practice analysis every five years,

previously conducted in 2017. The item writers, who were selected through the 2023 Call for Item Writers, were given assignments based on the domains that were identified from the mapping exercise. The practice exam reviewers then reconvened in March to review and approve the new items for the 2024/2025 version of the CGC practice exam, which launched on June 1, 2024, and thanks to the work of this committee provides over 30 new questions.

Some changes that candidates will experience with the new practice exam include:

- Delivered in the same platform that the CGC certification exam is delivered.
- Provides 100 questions, and candidates will be allowed 120 minutes to complete the exam, which aligns to exactly half of the questions and time allotted for the CGC certification exam.
- Candidates will receive a report detailing the performance by subdomain after completion.
- After completing the practice exam, candidates will have the opportunity to review any questions that they got wrong.



Sharon Axford | MS, CGC, Co-Chair

Most recently, the committee released a call for expert panelists to help provide rationale to support the new learning activities that aim to explore how a certified genetic counselor makes judgements in situations someone might consider tricky or unstandardized, where we expect there is no one right approach. The committee selected 13 panelists to help with this effort. The CCC is summarizing the rationale that was provided by panelists and are currently developing literature reviews that will be incorporated into this new learning activity. More information about the launch of this new program will be shared with the ABGC Diplomates in the coming months.

ABGC, ABGC committees, Diplomates and candidates. As one example, the DEIJ Glossary provides an overview of “ability diversity” terms, such as ableism — a set of beliefs or practices that devalue

With this document published, the committee is now charged with developing a proposal for a new certification scholarship program that will provide financial assistance to candidates.



Claire Davis | MS, CGC, Co-Chair

Continuing Competence Committee

As a quick reminder, in June of 2023, ABGC provided a brief look into the work that the **Continuing Competence Committee (CCC)** has been developing over the last few years. The CCC goal is to ensure that continuing competency

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for GCs meet industry standards. Most genetic counselors would agree that they have learned a lot through their careers and are looking for additional opportunities to expand their knowledge outside of their current specialty. The new learning activities that will be built into ABGC’s recertification program will do just that. The learning activities have been developed over the last year.



Enrique Lopez | MS, LCGC, Chair



Josie Baker | MS, CGC, Co-Chair

DEIJ Committee

Since the DEIJ’s last update in the fall, the glossary of terms subgroup has accomplished creating a DEIJ Glossary, which serves as a basic framework of terminology and examples to promote discussions surrounding DEIJ topics for



and discriminate against people with disabilities with the assumption people with disabilities need to be “fixed.”

The glossary will continue to be updated over time to reflect the expansion and understanding of DEIJ. The committee is working to share the DEIJ Glossary with partner organizations, such as NSGC, GCEA and ACGC, and can be used by all stakeholders for their DEIJ needs as well — **accessible on our website.**

With this document published, the committee is now charged with developing a proposal for a new certification scholarship program that will provide financial assistance to candidates. While this is still being developed by the committee, more updates will be shared as they are available. ●

ABGC Updates Is a Resource for Exam Candidates



Have you explored the [ABGC Updates](#) section of the ABGC website? Not only are newsletter articles shared on this digital platform each time an edition of the *ABGC Newsletter* releases, additional Diplomate spotlights and articles covering exam study topics are published here throughout the intervening months.

Written by recently credentialed genetic counseling professionals, two main exam study series are developing on this hub:

- **General study tips from a genetic counseling perspective.** There are many study tips available on the internet, but these articles are meant to share the unique perspectives of genetic counselors who have recently passed the exam, allowing them to share the strategies they successfully leveraged. Articles in this series so far include [general tips from three different CGCs](#) and [self-care tips as you study](#).
- **Study resource suggestions reflecting each content category.** These articles allow recently credentialed CGCs to share the resources they have found helpful for specific exam content categories. So far, an article on [prenatal study resources](#) has been published.

Exam candidates and program directors are often requesting additional resources for students, so these article series were developed to provide an additional study source. Additionally, search engine optimization (SEO) research conducted by ABGC staff revealed a myriad of Google searches requesting study tips for those preparing for the CGC exam. These articles will help answer those search requests while also directing candidates toward the Candidate Guide and Content Outline.

ABGC encourages program leaders to share these articles with candidates to increase confidence and provide new insights for those preparing for the exam. If you know of recently credentialed CGCs who have expertise in any of the content categories, please encourage them to write for *ABGC Updates*. [Reach out to our team for more information.](#)

Please note these articles are meant to provide suggestions based on a few genetic counselors' exam preparation experiences. These are suggestions only and are not meant as an exhaustive guide or exclusive study resource. Refer to the [ABGC Candidate Guide](#) and Content Outline for official information from ABGC. ●

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Four-year terms begin January 1 and end December 31

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