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Strategic Planning – Not Just Words on Paper: A Message From the President

Angie Trepanier, MS, CGC

IT WAS WONDERFUL to see so many genetic counselors at the National Society of Genetic Counselors' Annual Conference in September. Every time I attend, I am awestruck by the incredible work being done by our colleagues, the many ways the genetic counseling profession continues to evolve and the collective passion for enhancing the provision of evidence-based and inclusive services.

There were several sessions that resonated with me related to ABGC's role in assessing initial and continuing competence, a few of which I will mention here. The Beverly Rollnick Memorial Lecture on the challenges of gene therapy for sickle cell disease reminded me of the critical importance of evaluating genetic counselor competence in understanding how disparities, inequities and systemic bias affect care and knowing how to provide inclusive, just, equitable and safe care. The professional issues panel on genetic counseling around the globe led me to contemplate whether we need to reassess our ABGC processes for determining whether graduates from programs not accredited by the Accreditation Council for Genetic Counseling (ACGC) are eligible to sit for our certification exam. The plenary session on long-read sequencing demonstrated the necessity of evaluating continuing genetic counselor competence given

rapid changes in technologies and practice. The plenary session describing our new genetic counseling code, 96041, and its potential impact on workflows demonstrates the importance of initial and continuing competence in financial considerations in service delivery. Further, talking to Diplomates at the ABGC booth gave me an opportunity to hear about challenges related to certification and recertification, which can be helpful in informing future practices.

As a credentialing body, ABGC is responsible for keeping abreast of changes in genetic counseling practice that may impact certification and recertification. We achieve this through many different channels including conducting a practice analysis every five years; gathering input from our board members, volunteer leaders, other genetics organizations and other important partners and Diplomates; incorporating guidance and best practices from our test vendor (Prometric) and the credentialing association we are members of (Institute for Credentialing Excellence); and learning from our staff's expertise in credentialing practices. Then, every three to four years, we evaluate all this information formally, with Diplomates, experts, and strategic planning facilitators, to develop a new strategic plan. The plan lays out the goals



Angie Trepanier | MS, CGC

ABGC wants to achieve in the next three years and the specific objectives related to these goals. Strategic planning takes into consideration the fact that there may be many goals an organization wants to accomplish but realistically cannot due to resource allocation, human resources, structural barriers (e.g., current practices in credentialing) and the current environment. Strategic planning allows us to identify and discuss many goals related to our role in credentialing and then prioritize those that are most important and achievable.

Prior to our official strategic planning meeting, held Nov. 5 – 6, the Board completed initial steps in developing

the plan and sent surveys to those impacted to inform this work. Our strategic planning Board meeting then involved meeting in person with our partner organizations to more fully vet and develop a draft plan.

We know there are several issues of key importance to our Diplomates when it comes to ABGC's work. We hear you and agree that it is our responsibility to ensure the exam is not biased in a way that disadvantages some test takers and that it a fair measure of competence. We recognize the importance of making the exam financially accessible and providing equitable access. We appreciate the importance of being able to certify in a timely fashion given state licensure laws. We understand the necessity of staying abreast of best practices in certification and assessing whether methods other than multiple choice exams might be viable options.

ABGC is already working on some of these issues. Over the last year, we have reduced exam fees and are now offering a needs-based scholarship to offset the cost of the exam. We continue to take steps to reduce possible bias in the exam by having diverse representation among item writers and Certification Exam Committee (CEC) members, all of whom are provided implicit bias training. We have begun collecting (voluntary) demographic information from candidates as another step towards identifying bias and have convened an Exam Task Force to investigate factors associated with exam performance.



I am proud of the work ABGC is doing and am incredibly honored to work with so many dedicated volunteers and our wonderful staff. But I know there is much more work to do. Through our strategic planning activities, including Diplomate and collaborating organization input, we will identify and prioritize our next steps as an organization. Ultimately, the strategic goals and objectives we

develop will be aligned with our core purpose of promoting high standards in genetic counseling, in the context of our core values of integrity, responsiveness, excellence and inclusivity. ●

Sincerely,
Angie Trepanier
MS, CGC

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Digital Badging & Scholarship Innovation: An Update From the Executive Director

Heather Rich, MPA, ICE-CCP



2024 HAS BEEN an important year for ABGC. I have been honored to work alongside your Board of Directors and the ABGC staff to implement innovations improving our ability to serve Diplomates and candidates. I would like to share a few recent accomplishments with you here.

First, I hope you have received an email outlining how to utilize your new digital badges. These badges launched at the end of Sept. as a way for CGCs to continue to promote their excellence, professionalism and competence to external parties they interact with. These badges can be shared in email signatures, on LinkedIn and more.

This new initiative is another way our Board is providing Diplomates with continued tools to promote themselves and the profession. If you cannot find your email with digital badge instructions, please reach out to our team for support.

An additional exciting offering is our Needs Based Certification Scholarship for candidates taking the ABGC Certification Examination. This scholarship will increase access to the exam for those with a

financial need, allowing ABGC to break barriers to the profession. The Board appreciates promotion of this scholarship by educational professionals or recently credentialed professionals who have contacts prepping for the exam.

Along those lines, at the NSGC Annual Conference, ABGC's booth interacted with many prospective CGCs who asked great questions about the exam. We were able to provide tips and feedback for them, and we are always happy to speak to those of you at the conference. In addition, we heard many compliments about ABGC's recent changes from Diplomates, feedback we appreciate.

My hope, on behalf of the ABGC Board, is the investment in technology and innovation, and the adoption of the scholarship program and strategic

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Future initiatives I'm excited about include the ABGC-NSGC bridge, which will launch on Jan. 1, 2025. This innovation to the current ABGC portal will begin electronically transferring CEUs earned from that date and later. Keep on the lookout for more communications about what this means for you this fall. Also, the Continuing Competence Committee continues to develop our new learning scenario approach to CEUs. This approach will be voluntary in 2025, with completion of the scenarios automatically counting toward 2026 CEUs. Read further updates to this on page 4.

Looking ahead, the Board's strategic planning process began this month, and we are hoping to have these finalized by Dec. or Jan. of 2025. This plan will outline our goals through 2027.

So much innovation and change has happened this year. I am looking forward to serving you all in 2025 and beyond using the tools we have and are developing. ●

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.

Continuing Competence Committee



Sharon Aufox | MS, CGC, Co-Chair



Claire Davis | MS, CGC, Co-Chair

Building off the last update, our work continues to be rooted in evaluating the current recertification process for certified genetic counselors and ensuring that we stay committed to promoting high standards within the field of genetic counseling.

The CCC has worked over the last year to develop reflective learning scenarios that will be integrated into the recertification process. In the beginning of 2024, the committee worked with additional volunteers to review the proposed

scenarios. Since then, the committee has worked on developing educational summaries that will be provided after each scenario is completed. We are excited to share that we are officially offering the opportunity to complete two of the new learning scenarios in 2025, with the official launch and requirement for recertification effective as of Jan. 1, 2026.

We are excited to share that we are officially offering the opportunity to complete two of the new learning scenarios in 2025, with the official launch and requirement for recertification effective as of Jan. 1, 2026.

Anyone who completes both scenarios that are released in 2025 will be granted those CEUs in 2026.

For more information, you can **visit this page on the ABGC website** about the new learning scenarios that will house additional resources provided by ABGC including an informational webinar, short video previews of the software and answers to frequently asked questions.



Amy Shikany | MS, CGC, Chair

Certification Exam Committee



Katherine Dunn | MS, CGC,
Vice Chair

In September, we reviewed 76 items written by this year's item writing committee. These items were written to fill in areas of need within the exam content outline. Approved items will be considered for pre-testing on the 2025 exam forms before becoming eligible as a scored item.

Additionally, the CEC leadership has been working to condense the reference list for the certification exam. This includes re-referencing items that might have previously been referenced to an obscure source. The overall goal is to minimize the number of references for test takers to consider when studying for the exam.

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Looking ahead to 2025, current committee Vice-Chair Katie Dunn will become chair and Elizabeth Seiwart, LGC, will become vice-chair.

DEIJ Committee

Since the DEIJ Committee's last update, we are excited to share that we have created the ABGC Needs Based Certification Scholarship. We recognize the financial burden the certification exam may have on individuals, and we hope to support many with this opportunity.

This scholarship provides financial support for the certification exam for graduates or students in the final semester of an approved Accreditation Council for Genetic Counseling (ACGC) program. This is a new initiative dedicated to promoting diversity and equity in our profession, aiming to support individuals who bring diverse perspectives and have the potential to make a positive impact on the genetic counseling field.

One focus while developing the scholarship was to create a more equitable application process for individuals to share their qualifications. The application allows individuals to share their diverse perspectives in the form of multiple mediums, including essay, video or audio submissions.



Enrique Lopez | MS, CGC, Chair



Josie Baker | MS, CGC, Vice Chair



Samantha Greenburg | PhD, MS, MPH, CGC, Chair

Nominating Committee

This summer, the ABGC Nominating Committee facilitated the process to establish a ballot for the 2025 ABGC Board of Directors. Working alongside the Board, we identified the core needs of the Board, developed a call for nominations and solicited nominations from the broader Diplomat community. We reviewed and adapted the application and interview questions to reflect the evolving state of the organization and the needs of diplomates. After conducting application review, we offered interviews and met

with qualified applicants to determine the ultimate ballot. We are grateful to the Diplomates who applied, and the broader community for making their voice heard through voting on the ballot. We are excited to welcome Amy Shikany, MS, CGC, and Sharon Chan, MS, CGC, MPH as new Board directors.

Over the next few months, we plan to revise and update Nominating Committee policies and procedures to continue streamlining the process and ensuring equity across all aspects of the nomination process. ●

Meet Your New Board Members: Sharon Chan, MS, CGC, MPH, and Amy Shikany, MS, CGC

SHARON CHAN, MS, CGC, MPH, is excited to serve as an ambassador for ABGC through her new position as a Board director. Her two decades of contribution to the genetic counseling profession have made an impact. Currently, she works as director for Sutter Health's genetics program. Here, she has expanded the value and reach of CGCs — for example, through the annual Know Your Genes event, a CGC-led philanthropy program that provides genetic counseling and testing to underserved populations in Northern California. Prior to this role, she worked as a clinical genetic counselor in various health systems. Her combined experience has allowed her to connect the dots on political, financial and administrative reasons that drive or hinder the growth of genetic counseling services.

As a CGC and now as a Board member, Chan is passionate about upholding

high standards of competence for CGCs. She says, "As my personal career as well as the GC profession as a whole evolve, I have witnessed ABGC's intentional efforts to make timely decisions and take appropriate actions based on changing needs, ultimately benefiting the CGC community and the people we serve. As a firm believer in ABGC's mission, I hope to use my experience and skills to further the organization's goals."

Chan is also passionate about inclusivity. Her aim is to encourage people from a wide range of backgrounds and with diverse perspectives to join the profession, which she believes will elevate the profession's talent pool and allow us to work toward diversifying career opportunities for CGCs.

The future of the profession is of key interest to her. In her work life, she supervises externships and teaches



Sharon Chan | MS, CGC, MPH

courses both in the U.S. and in Hong Kong. Doing so has strengthened her cultural competency, which she practices in her professional role. She encourages fellow CGCs to think beyond individual patients and to use genetics expertise to improve health outcomes for entire communities.



Amy Shikany | MS, CGC

AMY SHIKANY, MS, CGC, is a valuable member of the ABGC leadership team, having most recently served on our Certification and Education Committee (CEC), lending her voice to important work developing in the industry. Prior to this, she volunteered as an item writer,

contributing items based on her area of practice (cardiovascular genetics). She shares, "I fell in love with the writing process, and enjoyed the personal connection I made with mentors on the CEC. I knew I was contributing to an exam that was reflective of my own valuable clinical experiences." Now, she brings this background and passion to her position as a director on the ABGC Board.

Shikany began her career as a biology major when she worked in the genetics lab at the National Zoo, spending her days extracting DNA from various large animal poo. Upon graduation, she worked in a neuroanatomy lab, but realized she wasn't cut out for lab work. This led her to studying genetic counseling at Sarah Lawrence College, and she started her first position as a GC at the Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center — a position she retains 14 years later.

As a Board member, Shikany resonates particularly with ABGC's core value of responsiveness, which involves recognizing and taking action based on emerging needs within the field. Her long-term goal is to uphold this value amid the shifting landscape of the profession, continuing to guide Diplomates by improving communication and education opportunities. She is particularly interested in expanding the informational resources available to exam candidates, Diplomates and educational training programs around the Certification Examination.

She is passionate about the initiatives led by the Board and DEIJ Committee as well as ensuring that participation in the certification practice analysis — which happens every five to seven years — reflects a broad genetic counselor workforce and our diverse scope of practice. ●

ABGC Spotlight: Sophia Ceulemans, MS, CGC, NSGC Volunteer

SOPHIA CEULEMS, MS, CGC, is the 2024 Annual Conference Program Committee chair for the National Society of Genetic Counselors (NSGC). This role along with her work on NSGC's Education Committee ensure genetic counselors have access to valuable professional development and networking opportunities. Read on to learn about her role, experiences as a CGC and service with NSGC.

ABGC: Can you describe your current role? What do you enjoy most about this position?

Sophia Ceulemans, MS, CGC (SC): In my current role as a pediatric clinical genetic counselor, I meet one-on-one with people and their families within neurology and general genetics departments. I also staff several multidisciplinary clinics such as the neuromuscular clinic, epilepsy clinic and tuberous sclerosis clinic. I find my autonomous role to be very rewarding, and it is an honor to talk with people about their genes and their feelings about them. I also supervise GC students, lecture on a variety of topics and interact with trainees across specialties. What I enjoy most about this position is the opportunity to work closely with both the clinical teams and the families we serve, making genetic information more accessible.

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The multidisciplinary nature of my role allows me to collaborate with experts in genetics and neurology, while also making a tangible difference in the lives of people and their families. The most rewarding aspect is knowing that my work helps to guide families through their medical journey, providing them with the information and support they need to make informed decisions.

ABGC: Can you share about a time you have been challenged in your career? How did you overcome it?

SC: A challenging moment in my career was when I was working on a particularly complex case involving a child with multiple, severe neurological issues. Despite extensive genetic testing, we struggled to find a clear diagnosis, which was incredibly frustrating for both the medical team and the family.

I overcame this challenge by persisting with additional research, consulting with experts and eventually leading a collaborative effort that involved multiple specialists. This process not only



Sophia Ceulemans | MS, CGC

led to a diagnosis but also reinforced the importance of perseverance and teamwork in our field, including a poster at the American Society of Human Genetics that further contributed to our growing body of knowledge. It was a reminder that while genetic counseling often deals with uncertainty, our commitment to thoroughness and collaboration can lead to meaningful outcomes.



ABGC: Can you share about your experience volunteering with NSGC?

SC: Volunteering with NSGC has been an incredibly fulfilling part of my career. Serving on the Annual Conference Program Committee and eventually stepping into leadership roles, like vice chair and chair, has allowed me to contribute to the professional growth of our field. I've had the opportunity to shape the content of our conferences, ensuring that they reflect the latest advances in genetic counseling and address the needs of our diverse membership. I have not always felt a sense of belonging at our conferences, and it has been enlightening and also invigorating to be on the other side of planning.

This experience has deepened my appreciation for the collaborative nature of our profession and the importance of continued education and networking. It has been a lot of fun!

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ABGC: What advice do you have for someone beginning their genetic counseling journey?

SC: My advice for someone starting their genetic counseling journey is to remain curious and foster a practice of self-reflection. Genetic counseling is a dynamic field, and it's essential to stay engaged with both the scientific advancements and the human aspects of the work. Don't be afraid to ask questions, seek out mentors and get involved in professional organizations like NSGC, though there are many other

organizations that do meaningful work as well, including ones that may be local to you. These connections will not only help you grow as a professional but will also provide you with a supportive community that can offer guidance and encouragement. Lastly, remember that the heart of genetic counseling lies in compassionate care — always keep the patient's experience at the center.

ABGC: What do you enjoy doing in your free time, outside of genetic counseling?

SC: Outside of my professional life, I enjoy exploring the outdoors, whether it's hiking in the local mountains or enjoying the beach. I am grateful for strong friendships inside and outside of my genetic counseling community, as it keeps me grounded and feeling supported. Fermenting foods, tending to composting worms and watching terrible television are some of my current interests. ●

2024 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Four-year terms begin January 1 and end December 31

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