



Canadian Association of Genetic Counsellors  
Association Canadienne des Conseillers en Génétique

## **CODE OF ETHICS FOR CANADIAN GENETIC COUNSELLORS (2006)**

### **Preamble**

Genetic counsellors are healthcare providers with a Master's degree in genetic counselling or equivalent training and proven competence. Genetic counsellors working or trained in Canada are encouraged to belong to the Canadian Association of Genetic Counsellors, our recognised professional body, and to maintain CAGC Certification. Genetic counsellors are expected to act ethically in all professional relationships and to be aware of the guidelines herein and the principles on which they are based. Each genetic counsellor has responsibilities to patients, to colleagues, to society as a whole, and to her/himself.

### **Introduction**

The CAGC Code of Ethics was written to help genetic counsellors recognise the implications of their actions in routine as well as challenging professional circumstances. It is meant to remind us of the principles of medical ethics: justice, autonomy, beneficence, and non-maleficence. It is also meant to promote confidence in the profession of genetic counselling and its representative body.

This Code outlines the minimum standards expected of each genetic counsellor in relationship to others. This document should be used in conjunction with the *Scope of Practice*, one's professional judgement, and be applied under the laws of Canada. This Code is not intended to replace the supervision and guidance offered to genetic counsellors working in hospitals, universities, research settings and/or private organizations. When a serious ethical matter arises, a genetic counsellor is expected to confer with supervisors and/or an institutional ethics committee.

The concepts and expectations laid out here arose from the body of medical ethics literature and a survey of the CAGC membership undertaken in 2003/4.

### **Patients**

Genetic counsellors translate complex clinical and scientific information so that individuals and families can adjust to new diagnoses, make informed choices, and benefit from advances in the field of medical genetics. The autonomy of patients and non-judgmental provision of services is paramount.

- A genetic counsellor recognises and respects the ability of individuals and families to balance the risks and benefits of services offered and then to make the appropriate decisions for themselves.
- A genetic counsellor supports individuals through decision-making or refers them to a colleague who can.
- A genetic counsellor will act in the best interest of their patients and will offer appropriate clinical and psychosocial support, advocate, and refer to other professionals as necessary.
- A genetic counsellor is expected to ensure that patients and their families give appropriate informed consent for procedures, tests, and research.
- Genetic counsellors will respect their patients' confidentiality in accordance with existing regulations in medical and research settings.
- A genetic counsellor will treat every patient with dignity and compassion.
- Genetic counsellors have a particular responsibility to ensure vulnerable patients are treated with due care.

### Society

Genetic counsellors are committed to the principles of justice and fairness and therefore value diversity, pluralism and the goal of equal access to medical services.

- Genetic counsellors should stay abreast of new developments in their area(s) of expertise.
- Genetic counsellors promote awareness of the roles of medical genetics professionals through activities such as participation in multi-disciplinary teams, providing public education, contributing to policy-making and provincial/national consultation.
- Above all, genetic counsellors are expected to demonstrate respect for others, regardless of race, religion, creed, sexual preference, gender, ability, and socio-economic or genetic background.

### Colleagues

Genetic counsellors provide services that are often coordinated with those of other healthcare professionals and will need to communicate their relevant experience, knowledge and opinions to colleagues.

- Genetic counsellors strive to represent the profession and are committed to being a source of reliable and peer-reviewed genetic information.
- Genetic counsellors should foster competence and accountability within the genetic counselling community.
- Genetic counsellors will seek advice from their colleagues, supervisors or ethics teams when concerned about the clinical or ethical behaviour of colleagues.
- In the quest for professional excellence, genetic counsellors value continuing education, cooperation and mentorship between genetic and non-genetic colleagues.

### Self

Honesty and integrity are central to good practice of genetic counselling in any setting.

- Genetic counsellors are expected to work within their scope of professional practice and maintain a high standard of counselling, critical thinking and analytic skills
- Genetic counsellors should seek opportunities for continuing education.
- Genetic counsellors have the responsibility of self-evaluation and to maintain a reflective practice.
- Genetic counsellors value the concept of self-care and will foster the well-being of themselves and their colleagues.
- Genetic counsellors should be aware of their own limitations and remain cognisant of how social context may influence relationships.

### **References**

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