

The Professional and Personal Experience of Genetic Counselors with Dual Graduate Degrees: The NJLEND Perspective

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BACKGROUND

- Professional development in the field of genetic counseling is not a new area of study¹⁻³
- The Committee on Advanced Training for Certified Genetic Counselors (CATCGC) developed a framework to assist genetic counselors (GCs) in cultivating advanced skills to aid in their professional development⁴
- Research has not been performed to explore the experience of GCs with dual graduate degrees, especially those with additional master's-level training
- Purpose of NJLEND is to train health professionals "to provide high-quality, interdisciplinary, family-centered, culturally competent care addressing the complex needs of children with autism, related disabilities and other maternal and child health populations"⁵

OBJECTIVES

- Understand the motivations of GCs in pursuing dual graduate degrees and the challenges faced while earning the degrees
- Understand how GCs with dual graduate degrees utilize their skill sets within their career
- Understand the overall impact of dual graduate degrees on the GC
- Understand how GCs with dual graduate degrees better able to provide competent care to their patients per the objectives of NJLEND

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RESULTS

- 61 GCs successfully responded to the pre-interview survey had an MS/MGC in genetic counseling and a degree in another field- EdD, MA, MAT, MBA, MEd, MLIS, MS/MSc, MD, MPH, MSW, and PhD
- 15 GCs with dual graduate degrees were selected to participate in a semi-structured interview- MA, MBA, MLIS, MS/MSc, MPH, MSW, and PhD

Where I used my MPH the most, I think, was trying to understand what the population was that was around me, how do I ensure they understand that our clinic exists, and how can I make sure that we kind of adapt our approach to make sure that we are benefiting the different groups that are coming in to see us. (Participant #1, MPH)

I often say that being a psychotherapist makes me a better genetic counselor because I can use those skills that I learned as a psychotherapist in my genetic counseling practice, but also having the medical background, especially working in a medical field for so long, being a genetic counselor makes me a better psychotherapist because there are things that I just know from that medical background that helped me fast track and triage the assistance that a client in the psychotherapy realm might need. So, I really feel like both hats that I wear have made me better at the other job. (Participant #3, MA)

You know my career goals are very simple and they always have been. I like working with patients. I do not have goals to move up a corporate ladder. My goals have always been to work with patients and families and to help improve the quality of their lives, full stop. (Participant #10, MSW)

DISCUSSION

- Barriers exist to earning advanced skills by dual graduate degrees, including financial barriers, accessibility of graduate degree programs, and difficulty balancing personal and professional responsibilities
- The framework developed by the CATCGC may assist GCs in bypassing some barriers to develop advanced skills, but pathways to develop certain advanced skills may not be represented⁴
- Accessibility of dual graduate degrees could be improved by offering dual graduate degree programs for GCs and providing financial assistance

CONCLUSIONS

- GCs with dual graduate degrees are innately interdisciplinary, and use their degrees to provide more competent care to their patients relating to the objective of NJLEND
- Further research needs to be performed to further elucidate other GC experiences
- Professional development of GCs and the expansion of the genetic counseling field continues to remain a professional issue

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