

**UNC Greensboro
MS Genetic Counseling Program
Policy on Professional Impairment for Students**

Introduction

The UNC Greensboro MS Genetic Counseling Program recognizes its responsibility to provide education and training that will promote student attainment of the knowledge, skills and competencies necessary to function as competent health care professionals in genetic counseling. Attainment of knowledge, skills and competencies is a developmental process that occurs over time. Program faculty and clinical supervisors are committed to providing instruction, mentoring and feedback to students in a constructive atmosphere that allows students to meet the goals of the program.

The *Policy on Professional Impairment for Students* applies to rare situations in which a student experiences significant difficulties in attaining the knowledge, skills, and/or competencies that will allow him or her to function as competent genetic counseling professionals. This policy is intended to be used with students who are not making adequate progress in the developmental process of becoming a genetic counselor. The problems described in this policy occur rarely and therefore it is rarely necessary to implement the full procedures described in the policy.

Program faculty, including clinical training supervisors, bear multiple loyalties – not only to their students but also to the profession and to the public.

- Program faculty and clinical supervisors have a responsibility to teach and supervise their students, which is typically done in the context of an amicable relationship.
- These individuals also have a responsibility to protect the public from incompetent professionals and to maintain the ethics and standards of the profession.
- Unfortunately, it is possible that not all students are capable of becoming competent professionals who will maintain the standards of the profession.
- In these cases, the program is obliged to take action

Student Awareness

Effective Fall 2004, this policy will be included in the MS Genetic Counseling Program Online Handbook. All students will be provided with a copy of the policy and asked to sign a statement stating that they have reviewed the policy. This signature will be retained in the student's file.

Definition of Professional Impairment

Generally, professional impairment for a genetic counseling student can be defined as any combination of personal characteristics, emotional difficulties, situations, and/or lack of competency (knowledge or skills) that interferes with a student's ability to function in a professional manner.

In determining whether a student is exhibiting professional impairment the following criteria are considered (adapted from Lamb, et al, 1987):

- The problem is not restricted to one area of professional functioning.
- The student has difficulty acknowledging, understanding and/or addressing the problem when it is identified.
- The problem is not merely a reflection of the normal progression in competency and skills expected throughout training or specific deficits in knowledge or skills that can be rectified by academic or didactic training.
- The quality of clinical services delivered by the student is consistently negatively affected by the impairment/problem.
- The student's behavior does not change as a function of feedback, remediation efforts and/or time.

Documents that describe standards of professional practice include:

- American Board of Genetic Counseling (ABGC) Practice Based Competencies
- National Society of Genetic Counselors (NSGC) Code of Ethics
- Practice Standards and Guidelines published by professional organizations (e.g. National Society of Genetic Counselors, American College of Medical Genetics)

Examples of behaviors, which may be evidence of professional impairment, include the following. The list contains examples, and is not intended to be definitive or all-inclusive.

- Violation of professional standards or ethical codes.
- Inability or unwillingness to acquire and demonstrate professional skills at an acceptable level of competency.
- Serious deficits in the areas of knowledge and application of professional standards.
- Behaviors that can reasonably be predictive of poor future professional functioning, such as extensive tardiness in client record-keeping, poor compliance with supervisory requirements.
- Interpersonal behaviors and intrapersonal functioning that impair one's professional functioning, such as psychopathology, inability to exercise good judgment, poor interpersonal skills, and pervasive interpersonal problems.

Documentation of Professional Impairment

1. Program Director, Assistant Director, Medical Director, other faculty evaluation
 - a. Concerns will be communicated to student verbally and documented in writing.
 - b. Documentation of concerns must be signed by student, program faculty member who raises concern as well as program director. These will be kept in confidential student file.

- c. Written documentation should include specific recommendations/ remediation plan.
2. Clinical rotation evaluations
 - a. Clinical supervisors must communicate concerns to student and Program staff both verbally and in writing
 - b. The clinical supervisor, student and program staff must sign written documentation of concerns; these should be embedded in written evaluation forms and/or provided as separate documents. These will be kept in confidential student files.
 - c. Written documentation should include specific recommendations/ remediation plan.

Possible Actions

This list contains examples and is not intended to be definitive. These actions are not hierarchal and need not be applied in all cases.

- A formal reprimand in the form of a written document signed by both the student and program faculty
- An unsatisfactory or failing grade in the clinical rotation course with the requirement that the rotation or the course be repeated. -
- Requirement that the student complete additional supervised clinical rotations.
- Requirement that the student complete additional coursework targeted towards remediation of deficiencies.
- Leave of absence from the program or suspension from the clinical rotation.
- Encouragement to withdraw from program.
- Formal dismissal from program.

Due Process: Evaluation of Professional Impairment

1. There is a written policy on professional impairment with signature evidencing student review of policy.
2. All students routinely receive evaluations verbally and in writing, including written notification of problems through periodic meetings with Program Director, Assistant Director and/or Medical Director as well as clinical supervision evaluation meetings.
3. Students may also receive in writing descriptions of specific incidences that may evidence professional impairment.
4. The student evidencing professional impairment will usually be given opportunity for remediation, with specific descriptions of problems, suggestions for remediation, time limits and consequences if remediation is not successful, all noted in writing. However, in egregious cases, immediate suspension or termination may be warranted.
5. When the student does not meet the requirements of remediation as previously specified, a judgment about whether the student may progress in the GC Program will be made by the Program Director in consultation with the Assistant Program Director and Medical Director.

6. When a judgment is made that serious professional impairment exists and that the consequences to the student are significant, the student may request a hearing in which the student may present his or her view of the situation. The hearing will be convened by the Program Director and will include the Assistant Program Director, Medical Director, as well as any faculty member or clinical supervisor who are involved in making judgments of serious professional impairment. One or more members of the External Advisory Committee who have not previously been involved in discussion regarding the student's performance will also be included in the hearing. Attorneys are not permitted to attend or participate in the hearing.
7. Within one week of the hearing, the student will receive written notification of the outcome of the hearing that will include opportunities for revision, if any, of the initial decision, the basis of the decision, and the opportunity to appeal.
8. After receiving written notification, the student may request an appeal within 14 days to the Dean of the Graduate School. (See Graduate School Bulletin for details of the appeal process).