

Thesis title: A survey of genetic counselor outreach activities
Emily Green, MS 2022

Despite being an established profession for many decades, awareness of genetic counseling remains limited among the general population. This hinders the ability of genetic counselors (GCs) to serve their patients and hinders the growth of diversity within the profession. Professional outreach is one important tool to combat this trend. Over the past few decades, there have been many calls for GCs to increase and improve outreach efforts. There are a number of published reports of individual outreach efforts, however there is a lack of data on the day-to-day activities of practicing GCs. In addition, little is known about the barriers which prevent GCs from engaging in or continuing outreach activities.

The goal of this study was to survey GCs and GCs students about their professional outreach activities, their motivations for engaging in outreach, and barriers they face. A semi-quantitative survey was distributed via association listservs (including _____) in March of 2021. In total, responses from 204 participants (155 GC and 49 students) were analyzed. The majority of respondents (79% and 65%) reported participating in outreach in 2021. Most respondents participated in a few events (≤ 5), primarily presentations or mentoring activities. Most interactions involved undergraduate students, followed by non-GC healthcare providers and graduate students. Of those respondents who did not engage in outreach in 2021, the primary reason was lack of time (61% GC respondents and 82% student respondents) and lack of opportunity (58% of GC respondents and 71% student respondents). Lack of time was cited as the strongest barrier to professional outreach, endorsed as either a strong or somewhat of a barrier by 89% of GC respondents.

The strongest motivations for engaging in professional outreach endorsed by the respondents were increasing awareness of GC services among other healthcare providers and diversifying the GC profession. When asked about factors which would motivate involvement in outreach, GC respondents endorsed logistical and/or financial support from local or regional professional organizations as the most motivating factors, followed by support from NSGC. Other motivating factors endorsed by over 50% of respondents were the opportunity to earn CEUs and the availability of preprepared outreach materials.

This study provides preliminary data on the outreach activities of GCs and students. While additional studies are needed to draw robust conclusions and recommendations, these results suggest several factors individuals and organizations should keep in mind when seeking to develop GC outreach. First, lack of time is the strongest barrier for both individual GCs and GC students. Second, support from local and regional actors may be more impactful than national groups. Finally, while respondents rated increasing awareness of GC services among other healthcare providers and the general public as high motivations for engaging in outreach, these activities were in the minority of those reported in this study. Most interactions involved undergraduate students, often individuals who were interested in becoming GCs. This points to a potential disconnect between the audiences GCs are interacting with and those they would like to reach.

Link to thesis: <https://repository.arizona.edu/handle/10150/665002>

