

Genetic counselling is quite a new branch of medicine, and many people don't know what it involves. This leaflet is to explain generally what to expect at a genetic counselling appointment.

What is genetic counselling all about?

Some conditions run in families. Genetic counsellors can give people information about these conditions, how they are inherited and how likely they are to happen in a family. If appropriate, we can also discuss the medical management of a disorder and what choices members of the family have in facing this situation.

Who needs genetic counselling?

Anyone who has questions about a condition which they think may be inherited. Some people may want information just for their own peace of mind. Many want to know their own chance of either inheriting or passing on conditions.

Some of the reasons for being referred include:

- A condition that runs in your family or your partner's family
- You or your partner already have a child with a physical or developmental problem
- You or your partner have a condition that might be passed on to your children
- You or your partner have experienced problems with pregnancy loss
- Particular types of cancer have occurred in several close relatives

How can genetic counselling help me?

There are several ways the **clinical geneticist (doctor)** and **genetic counsellor** can help to answer your concerns. Some of these are:

- Making or confirming a diagnosis
- Providing information about the condition and how it is inherited
- Discussing the chances that you may be affected by the condition in the future
- Discussing the chances that future children may be affected with the condition if it already occurs in your family
- Explaining the types of tests available
- Talking about ways of coping with the condition and the medical and social support available

Not everybody who comes to our clinic has a genetic condition

Will I be given advice?

Genetic counselling can help you make well-informed decisions for the future. Many people assume that the doctor will tell or advise them what to do when faced with difficult decisions. Instead, we concentrate on providing information and discussing options to help people make the best decisions for themselves.

Please bring any questions or concerns with you to your appointment - feel free to write them down if you wish.

What will happen first?

The genetic counsellor will usually contact you to arrange a visit at home or will talk with you on the telephone (sometimes, however, we arrange an appointment for you to come straight up to clinic).

This visit or phone call provides an opportunity to obtain details about your family and to draw a family tree. This helps us to give you accurate information in clinic. It also gives you time to talk about any concerns you have before you come to clinic.

After the visit or phone call, you will receive your clinic appointment letter to see a genetic counsellor or clinical geneticist (doctor).

If you need an interpreter, please let us know. We can provide one for both the home visit and the clinic.

What family details are helpful?

For as many close relatives as possible and for any other affected people in your family, it is helpful for us to know:

- Their full name
- Their date of birth
- Their address
- Their GP's name and address

If appropriate:

- The diagnosis they were given
- When and where they were diagnosed or treated