
CONSIDERATIONS FOR PROVIDING DIRECT GENETIC COUNSELING AND TESTING

Cancer genetic testing can be complex, and should be done in conjunction with genetic counseling by qualified providers.

Patients at risk of a hereditary cancer syndrome should undergo further cancer risk assessment, genetic counseling, and genetic testing. The genetic counseling process helps people understand and adapt to the medical, psychological, and familial implications of genetic contributions to disease. This process integrates risk assessment, education, and counseling. In some cases, it includes the offer of genetic testing, decision-making support and interpretation of results. Genetic counseling is best provided by specialists with knowledge and experience in clinical genetics, such as board certified genetic counselors, physician geneticists, and physicians, advanced-practice nurses, and physician assistants with dedicated training and expertise in cancer genetics.

This toolkit does not provide instruction on how to integrate genetic testing into the primary care practice, but interested practices may consider the following issues when deciding to offer counseling and testing in-house.

PARTICIPANTS

Implementation lead, providers

BARRIERS

Provider and staff training, time

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CONSIDERATIONS

Education. Primary care clinicians that offer genetic counseling and genetic testing do so after advanced training, which may include participation in specialized training programs, seeking out relevant education courses, finding a mentor, and education and support through a genetic testing laboratory. Clinicians should continually keep abreast of rapidly changing information and guidelines in cancer genetic testing. See the Appendix for a select list of education and training.

Genetic testing labs. Many laboratories offer cancer genetic testing. Select a reputable, CLIA-certified lab that can work with your institution and the patient's insurance company. In addition, consider the level of guidance you and your patient will need and investigate the support services the lab offers throughout the testing process. Labs may offer provider training, genetic counseling, a family history tool, and assistance with test ordering.

Implementation. Just as you would for other clinical processes, incorporating genetic counseling and genetic testing into practice requires an implementation plan that includes administrative and workflow planning. This may include defining certain scenarios in which the office would offer testing (for example, for hereditary colon and breast cancers) with a policy to refer other and more complex cases to a specialist. It should also include protocols for providing pre- and post-test genetic counseling. Systems must be in place to track insurance issues, advancements in genetic testing technology, and evolving clinical science.

Management. Practices that order genetic testing should be well versed on management protocols for high risk patients.