

Laboratory Genetic Counselors: A Valuable Resource for Best-Practice Care

Genetic testing is a growing trend across many healthcare specialties.

- There are ~75,000 genetic test products available, with 10 new tests entering the market each day.¹
- At HealthPartners health plan, claims for genetic testing increased ~65% between 2013 and 2017.
- The complexity of genetic testing and limited resources for provider decision support contribute to a 30% misuse/overuse rate.² Moreover, 54% of academic family physicians report feeling unknowledgeable about available genetic tests and 43% feel only somewhat knowledgeable.²

Patients can be caught in the middle if they receive genetic testing that their health plan does not cover.

- There is a wide variety of tests offered in today's marketplace. Many genetic tests are considered experimental/investigational and/or not medically necessary by health plans. When a laboratory bills the health plan, the patient may be liable for payment if there is no coverage for that test.
- Incorrect test ordering and/or interpretation can also lead to possible harm to the patient (e.g., misdiagnosis, unnecessary follow-up testing, incorrect treatment and/or medical management).

Laboratory Genetic Counselors help ensure that patients receive the right genetic test at the right time.

- Laboratory genetic counselors (GCs) are trained to answer complex questions from care providers, review medical records, and assist clinicians in choosing the best test for their patients' individualized needs. They also counsel care providers regarding when to involve a clinical GC. A clinical GC visit may further support the patient and care provider by facilitating education, shared decision-making, accurate interpretation of the test result, and translation of test results into a holistic care plan.
- In 2015, the HealthPartners care system hired two full-time laboratory GCs to provide Genetic Testing Decision Support (GTDS) program services.
- To date, the laboratory GCs have determined that 10-15% of tests ordered are not the most appropriate test for the patient. In these instances, the GCs are able to work with care providers to discuss cancellation or modification of the test order. Providers are generally appreciative of assistance from the GCs, and they report high satisfaction with the GTDS program services.³
- Laboratory GC decisions were in excellent alignment with current medical coverage policy (>90%).
- Laboratory stewardship efforts by HealthPartners health plan resulted in a decrease of \$0.25 PMPM.⁴

When patients receive the right test at the right time, health care institutions experience impressive cost-savings.

- HealthPartners laboratory GCs have effected a total cost avoidance to the care group of >\$2M since program implementation in June 2015, with an average cost-savings of ~\$700 per test (2017 data).
- Other institutions have realized a cost-savings of up to \$48,000 per month since implementing a laboratory GC program, with an average cost-savings of \$792 per test.² Another recent publication reported a higher error rate (2x) for genetic tests ordered by non-genetics providers, and demonstrated the many ways GCs are saving costs across the genetic testing spectrum for healthcare institutions, reference laboratories, and insurance plans.⁵

What you can do...

- Strongly consider implementing a laboratory GC program for expert assistance in making shared best-practice decisions about genetic testing for your patients.
- Utilize clinical GCs, when available, to ensure both provider and patient are well-informed about their genetic testing options.
- Verify that your patient's health plan offers coverage for genetic testing services *before* placing orders.

(1) Concert Genetics: concertgenetics.com (2) Miller CE, Krautscheid P, Baldwin EE, Tvrdik T, Openshaw AS, Hart K, LaGrave D. 2014. Genetic counselor review of genetic test orders in a reference laboratory reduces unnecessary testing. *Am J Med Genet Part A* 9999:1-8. (3) Unpublished survey data. (4) Unpublished data; PMPM = Per Member Per Month decrease from Q2 2016-Q2 2017. (5) Haidle JL, Sternen DL, Dickerson JA, Mroch A, Needham DF, Riordan CM, Kieke MC. Genetic Counselors Save Costs Across the Genetic Testing Spectrum. *Am J Manag Care* (2017) Aug; 23:SP428-30.