GCRAB Code of Conduct

Introduction

This Code of Conduct contains the personal and professional standards that Genetic Counsellors registered with the Genetic Counsellor Registration Advisory Board (GCRAB) must uphold. Registered Genetic Counsellors must act in accordance with the conduct at all times including when providing direct clinical care to patients and families, when utilising their professional knowledge to inform genetic counselling practice and associated practices such as leadership, management, research, education, policy and strategy.

The role of the GCRAB is to work with the Academy for Healthcare Science and set standards expected of all Registered Genetic Counsellors. However, these standards are also those that patients and public tell us they expect from us and should be thought of as standards expected from each of us on the register every day.

When joining our Register, and then renewing their registration, Genetic Counsellors commit to upholding these standards. This commitment to professional standards is fundamental to being part of a profession. The GCRAB can take action if those on our Register fail to uphold the Code. In serious cases, this can include removing them from the register.

The Code contains a series of statements that taken together signify what good genetic counselling practice looks like. It puts the interests of patients and service users first, is safe and effective, and promotes trust through professionalism.

In order to protect patients and professionals registered genetic counsellors will use the title ‘GCRAB Registered Genetic (Genomic) Counsellor’ as evidence that they meet the required standards.

The title ‘GCRAB Registered Genetic (Genomic) Counsellor’ can only be used after an individual has undergone the process of genetic counsellor registration as stipulated by the Genetic Counsellor Registration Board UK and ROI. It is mandatory for Genetic Counsellors to renew their registration on an annual basis whilst they continue to practice.

From November 2019, the GCRAB became accredited under the Academy of Healthcare Sciences (AHCS). The Register of Genetic Counsellors is now held with the Academy. It is expected that Registered Genetic Counsellors conduct their practice according to the AHCS Good Scientific Practice and Standards of Proficiency that benchmark the standards and values that apply throughout the professions of Registered Healthcare Scientists.

Genetic counsellors' code of ethics, good scientific practice and scope of practice

The AGNC Code of Ethics provides clarity and guidance for the ethical and professional conduct of genetic counsellors at all levels of training and professional registration working in the United Kingdom and Ireland. It acknowledges that ethical practice is essential in four main areas of responsibility: self-awareness and development, relationships with clients, relationships with colleagues and responsibilities within the wider society. All GCRAB Registered Genetic Counsellors must be aware of the ethical implications of their professional role, and adhere to the principles and guidelines in this code (AGNC Code of Ethics, 2021).

The GCRAB Scope of Practice outlines relevant professional skills, knowledge and the maintenance of updated, evidence-based care that prioritises the safety of our patients and their families. The scope is relevant to roles undertaking direct patient care, as well as roles in management, research, education, policy and strategy. Genetic counselling is a rapidly evolving and dynamic subspecialty within healthcare and it is recognised that nature and breadth of practice will continue to expand.

It is expected that Registered Genetic Counsellors will familiarise themselves with and conduct their practice according to the Academy for Healthcare Science Good Scientific Practice guidance and Standards of Proficiency that benchmark the standards and values that apply throughout an individual genetic counsellor's career at any level of practice.

Duties of Individual Registered Genetic Counsellors

Duty of Care

1. You must treat service users and carers as individuals, respecting their privacy and dignity.
2. You must treat service users and carers with kindness, compassion and respect.
3. You must work in partnership with service users and carers, involving them, where appropriate, in decisions about the care, treatment or other services to be provided.
4. You must avoid making assumptions and recognise diversity and individual, familial, cultural and religious choice within genetic counselling.
5. You must encourage and help service users, where appropriate, to maintain their own health and well-being, and support them so they can make informed decisions.
6. You must make sure that you have consent from service users or other appropriate authority before you provide care, treatment or other services.

7. You must not discriminate against service users, carers or colleagues by allowing your personal views to affect your professional relationships or the care, treatment or other services that you provide.
8. You must challenge colleagues if you think that they have discriminated against, or are discriminating against, service users, carers and colleagues including recognising conscious and unconscious bias.
9. You must keep your relationships with service users and carers professional.
10. You must be polite, considerate and respectful to service users, colleagues and the community in general.
11. You must ask for feedback and use it to improve your practice.

Communication, consent and confidentiality

12. You must give service users and carers the information they want or need, in a way they can understand.
13. You must make sure that, where possible, arrangements are made to meet service users' and carers' language and communication needs.
14. You must use a range of verbal and non-verbal communication methods, appropriate counselling skills and consider cultural sensitivities, to better understand and respond to people's personal and health needs.
15. You must check people's understanding from time to time to keep misunderstanding or mistakes to a minimum.
16. You must use all forms of communication appropriately and responsibly, including social media and networking websites.
17. You must treat information about service users as confidential.
18. You must make sure that you get properly informed consent and document it before carrying out any genetic counselling interventions.
19. You must keep to all relevant laws about mental capacity that apply in the country in which you are practicing, and make sure that the rights and best interests of those who lack capacity are still at the centre of the decision-making process.
20. You must tell colleagues, your manager and the person receiving care if you have a conscientious objection to a particular area of practice and arrange for a suitably qualified colleague to take over responsibility for that person's care under guidance from your manager.
21. You must only disclose confidential information if:
    - you have permission;
    - the law allows this;
    - it is in the service user's best interests; or
    - it is in the public interest, such as if it is necessary to protect public safety or prevent harm to other people.

Record keeping

22. You must keep full, clear, and accurate records for everyone you care for, treat, or provide other services to.
23. You must complete all records promptly and as soon as possible after providing care, treatment or other services.
24. You must keep records secure by protecting them from loss, damage or inappropriate access.

Maintaining boundaries, working with colleagues and delegation of care

25. You must access counselling supervision in accordance with the current counselling supervision guidelines.
26. You must work within the GCRAB Scope of Practice in terms of your knowledge, skills and experience.
27. You must keep your knowledge and skills up to date and relevant to your scope of practice through continuing professional development and in accordance with the current GCRAB guidelines on maintenance of registration.
28. You must work in partnership with colleagues, sharing your skills, knowledge and experience where appropriate, for the benefit of service users and carers.
29. You must share relevant information, where appropriate, with colleagues involved in the care, treatment or other services provided to a service user.
30. You must refer a service user to another practitioner if the care, treatment or other services they need are beyond your scope of practice and/or if the service user will benefit from it.
31. You must only delegate work to someone who has the knowledge, skills and experience needed to carry it out safely and effectively and provide appropriate supervision and support to those you delegate work to if it is necessary.

Minimising Risk

32. You must take all reasonable steps to reduce the risk of harm to service users, carers and colleagues as far as possible.
33. You must not do anything, or allow someone else to do anything, which could put the health or safety of a service user, carer or colleague at unacceptable risk.
34. You must make changes to how you practise, or stop practising, if your physical or mental health may affect your performance or judgement, or put others at risk for any other reason.
35. You must report any concerns about the safety or wellbeing of service users promptly and appropriately.
36. You must support and encourage others to report concerns in a timely way and not prevent anyone from raising concerns.
37. You must take appropriate action if you have concerns about the safety or wellbeing of children or vulnerable adults.

38. You must make sure that the safety and wellbeing of service users always comes before any professional or other loyalties.
39. You must acknowledge and act on concerns raised to you, investigating, escalating or dealing with those concerns where it is appropriate for you to do so.
40. You must be open and honest when something has gone wrong with the care, treatment or other services that you provide by:
    - informing service users or, where appropriate, their carers, that something has gone wrong;
    - apologising;
    - taking action to put matters right if possible; and
    - making sure that service users or, where appropriate, their carers, receive a full and prompt explanation of what has happened and any likely effects.

Duty of Candour

41. You must support service users and carers who want to raise concerns about the care, treatment or other services they have received.
42. You must give a helpful and honest response to anyone who complains about the care, treatment or other services they have received and work with your manager and organisation to maintain transparent and clear communication while it is being investigated.
43. You must make sure that your conduct justifies the public's trust and confidence in you and the genetic counselling profession.
44. You must declare issues that might create conflicts of interest and make sure that they do not influence your judgement.
45. You must tell us as soon as possible if:
    - you accept a caution from the police or you have been charged with, or found guilty of, a criminal offence;
    - another organisation responsible for regulating a health or social-care profession has taken action or made a finding against you; or
    - you have had any restriction placed on your practice, or been suspended or dismissed by an employer, because of concerns about your conduct or competence.
46. You must co-operate with any investigation into your conduct or competence, the conduct or competence of others, or the care, treatment or other services provided to service users.
47. You must uphold the best interest of the genetic counselling profession and the GCRAB at all times.
48. You must support the GCRAB by making yourself available to participate in its functions through elections, meetings, holding board positions and other board-related matters as and when you are able to.

Professional Indemnity arrangements

49. You must have in place an indemnity arrangement which provides appropriate cover for any practice as a registered genetic counsellor. This applies to work conducted within the NHS, private sector, education, research and all other related genetic counselling fields are areas of practice.

References:

AGNC Code of Ethics
https://www.agnc.org.uk/info-education/documents-websites/

GCRAB Scope of Practice (055_POL)

Academy for Healthcare Science. Good Scientific Practice and Standards of Proficiency
https://www.ahcs.ac.uk/registration/psa-accredited-register/healthcare-science-practitioner-register/standards-rules-guidance/

Standards of conduct, performance and ethics (2016). Health and Care Professionals Council.
https://www.hcpc-uk.org/resources/standards/standards-of-conduct-performance-and ethics/

The Code (2015). Nursing and Midwifery Council.
https://www.nmc.org.uk/globalassets/sitedocuments/nmc-publications/nmc-code.pdf

CMG Consent and Confidentiality in Genomic Medicine (3rd edition July 2019)

Report from the UK and Eire Association of Genetic Nurses and Counsellors (AGNC) Supervision Working Group on Genetic Counselling Supervision (2007). Authors: Clarke A, Middleton A, Cowley L, Guilbert P, Macleod R, Clarke A, Tran V. Journal of Genetic Counselling 16(2) p127-142