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# Licensing and Certification for New Genetic Counselors

Everything you need to know to transition  
to a fully Licensed and Certified GC

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Licensing and Certification for New Genetic Counselors:  
Everything you need to know to transition to a fully Licensed and Certified GC

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# Introduction

In 2015, I was audited during my first ABGC certification renewal. It was a nightmare. I had CEU certificates stashed in my office and at home, in emails and in file cabinets. Once I finally gathered and scanned all 60 of them, the file size was too large to email, and I ended up having to fax them in. While you may never find yourself in that exact situation, most genetic counselors I know have at least one story of being caught off-guard while trying to fulfill some important professional requirement. Whether it's realizing that the 10-hour course you just took only counts for 1 CEU (and not 10, like you thought), or anxiously waiting for that last CEU certificate to be issued before your license expires, there are many worries and tough situations that can be avoided if you were warned to look out for them ahead of time.

In 2019, using my nightmare audit experience as motivation, my husband and I launched an app called Elsie to help genetic counselors like me stay on top of their CEU requirements. Since then, we have helped hundreds of GCs streamline and organize their professional lives. In talking to our customers, we have heard stories from new grads and seasoned counselors about mistakes they've made and things they wish they had known earlier. These stories are the inspiration for this book.

This book is for anyone who is new to the genetic counseling field in the US, and is looking for practical tips regarding certification, licensure, and CEUs. It's designed to give you a deep enough understanding of these topics in order to:

- Avoid mistakes that could put your career in jeopardy
- Reduce confusion and time spent on licensure and CEUs
- Critically evaluate job offers in regards to certification and licensure support

Much like how reproductive genetic counseling can be more beneficial *prior* to conception, this book is most beneficial if you're a genetic counseling student who is nearing graduation and starting to look for your first job. However, if you've already graduated, passed the boards, or accepted a job, you will still find plenty of helpful content. I hope this book gives you the tools to approach licensing, certification and credentialing with confidence.

## Definitions and Acronyms

Here are some definitions and acronyms that will be used throughout this book.

**American Board of Genetic Counseling (ABGC)**- The national board that certifies genetic counselors in the United States.

**ABGC Certification**- The professional standard in the US that signifies that a person has demonstrated the minimum level of competence to work as a genetic counselor (GC). It is awarded to eligible candidates who pass the ABGC board exam.

**Accreditation Council for Genetic Counseling (ACGC)**- The national board that approves genetic counseling programs in the US and Canada.

**Active Candidate Status (ACS)**- The status granted by ABGC to GCs who have graduated from an ACGC-Accredited program and are eligible to take the board exam, but have not yet passed.

**Certified Genetic Counselor (CGC®)**- A GC who has passed the ABGC board exam and has current standing with the ABGC.

**Continuing Education Units (CEUs)**- Credits awarded for educational courses related to genetic counseling, earned after a GC is ABGC Certified.

**Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS)**- The federal organization that administers Medicare and Medicaid. They are responsible for setting regulations for reimbursement of medical services, including who can bill Medicare for medical services.

**Certification Maintenance Fee (CMF)**- The annual fee charged by ABGC to maintain your ABGC certification.

**National Society of Genetic Counselors (NSGC)**- The professional organization of genetic counselors in the United States that is responsible for approving CEUs.

**Professional Status Survey (PSS)**- The annual survey administered by NSGC to assess the state of the profession. The survey assesses salary and benefit information, job satisfaction, work settings, and GC demographic info, among other items.

# ABGC Certification

Passing the board exam grants you the title of Certified Genetic Counselor, and gives you the right to add CGC to the end of your name. This signifies that you have met the nationally agreed upon minimum standard to be a genetic counselor in the US.

Most employers will require ABGC certification as a way to ensure that a GC has basic working knowledge of genetic counseling. However, because the ABGC is a private organization and not a government one, the legal utility of this certification is limited. If an employer chooses, they can hire people without ABGC certification for genetic counseling jobs, unless they operate in a state with genetic counseling licensure. We will discuss licensure in detail in later chapters.

As a new grad or soon to be grad of a US genetic counseling program, I'm sure you've spent countless hours thinking about the ABGC Board exam. I won't go over the details of the content of the exam here, but there are some practical aspects that you need to know in order to successfully register and sit for the exam.

## Registering for the Boards

ABGC uses a 3rd-party company called PSI Exam Services to administer the board exam. PSI offers in-person exams and virtual proctoring. In 2023, it costs \$900 to take the exam the first time, and \$800 for each subsequent attempt.

Not just anyone can take the boards. In order to qualify to take them, you have to meet the ABGC's criteria. The most straight-forward way to qualify is to graduate from an ACGC-Accredited genetic counseling program in the US or Canada. Exceptions are sometimes made for people educated outside the US, but being a genetic counselor in another country does not automatically qualify you to take the US boards.

When you graduate from an ACGC-Accredited program, you'll need to apply for Active Candidate Status (ACS). This is not automatically granted upon graduation, but will become official when you register with PSI to take the board exam. Having ACS is a

requirement for temporary/provisional licenses, so if you want to work before you pass the boards, you'll need to register with PSI as soon as possible.

Once granted, your ACS status will expire 5 years from your *grad school graduation date* (not 5 years from when you registered). For full instructions on how to obtain ACS, [click here](#). Once you're ready to register, go to PSI's website [here](#).

## Board Exam Results

In most cases, you'll find out if you have passed as soon as you finish the exam. Occasionally, like in August of 2023, the board will delay releasing the scores for 6-8 weeks in order to make adjustments to the exam scoring.

If you pass, your official certification date will start on the first day of the month after your exam date; that is, March 1st for February exam takers, and September 1st for August exam takers.

After you've passed, it could take a few weeks for your status in the ABGC system to change from "Active Candidate" to "Certified." Once that happens, you'll receive instructions from ABGC to register for their portal. From there, you'll be able to prove your certification status to employers and licensing boards. [Click here](#) to learn how to send a certification verification to a 3rd party from the ABGC Portal.

If you don't pass the boards, you'll have to register for the test again and pay for another attempt. If you have a temporary license, it may automatically expire after a failed attempt (more about that in Chapter 4).

## ABGC Renewal

ABGC Certification must be renewed every 5 years. To maintain your certification, you'll have to pay a Certification Maintenance Fee (CMF) to the board in January every year (currently \$85). This is payable through your ABGC Portal. If you don't pay your fee, you won't be able to send verification of your certification to 3rd parties. There is no ABGC renewal fee, but you won't be allowed to renew your certification if you have



outstanding CMFs. Also, if you have outstanding CMFs and the fee is raised, you'll have to pay the higher price for every year that you missed as well.

To renew your certification, you'll either need to take the board exam again (barf), or complete 12.5 CEUs (we'll discuss these in detail in later chapters).

### **End of Sample**

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