

Program Overview

Established in 2002, the Cancer Genetic Counseling Program is an important part of Inova Health System's commitment to providing world-class oncology services. This program serves individuals who are at increased risk for hereditary cancer. We see patients and families with many different types of cancers, including breast, ovarian and colon cancer.

What is cancer genetic counseling?

To determine the risk of having hereditary cancer in one's family, an individual may wish to consider cancer genetic counseling. Though the majority of adult cancers occur in individuals who are not genetically predisposed to developing malignancy, a small number of families carry a hereditary predisposition to cancer.

At Inova, cancer genetic counseling is provided by a board-certified genetic counselor who is a Master's-level health professional trained in cancer risk assessment as well as in the special counseling needs of patients who choose to undergo genetic testing.

Cancer genetic counseling includes:

- Reviewing medical history, family history and other cancer risk factors and providing an estimate of a person's risk for developing specific cancers
- Estimating the likelihood that the cancers in a family are hereditary

- Providing cancer screening and risk-reducing recommendations based on an individual's level of risk
- Discussing the benefits, limitations and risks of genetic testing
- Providing genetic testing for appropriate individuals, and follow-up counseling to discuss the results and their meaning

Who can benefit from cancer genetic counseling?

Cancer genetic counseling is helpful for individuals with a personal and/or family history of:

- Early-onset cancers, such as breast or colon cancer diagnosed before age 50
- Cancer in two or more first-degree relatives on the same side of the family
- Multiple primary tumors (for example, a woman with two primary breast cancers, a woman with colon and endometrial cancer, or a man with primary colon and stomach cancer)
- Bilateral or multiple rare cancers
- Ashkenazi (Eastern European) Jewish ancestry, with a significant personal and/or family history of breast/ovarian cancer

What can I expect during a genetic counseling visit?

An initial genetic counseling appointment generally lasts one hour. During this first visit, the genetic counselor will collect medical and family history information, provide a genetic risk assessment and discuss the option of genetic testing in full detail. The counselor will also address such concerns as insurance discrimination, the privacy of your genetic testing results and the cost of testing.

If you decide to move forward with genetic testing, your counselor will facilitate the testing process. This includes deciding which laboratory to use,



completing test request forms and sending out the sample. Most genetic testing requires a simple blood draw of just one to two tubes of blood. Test results are typically available in two weeks; your genetic counselor will review the results in detail with you. Written information regarding the implications of the results and an original copy of the test results will be sent to you. If you authorize it, test results will also be sent to the physician who referred you for counseling and testing.

Will my insurance company cover the cost of genetic testing?

Many insurance companies will cover all or part of the cost of genetic testing. As part of our service, the genetic counselor will help you work with your insurance company to obtain benefit information and pre-authorization for testing. Coverage is generally based on an individual's specific plan and personal/family history of cancer.

Submitting the genetic testing bill to an insurance company provides minimal risk of insurance discrimination. Many states (including Virginia and Maryland), as well as the District of Columbia, have laws protecting individuals from insurance discrimination. Federal laws also exist. There is currently no direct evidence that people are experiencing health insurance discrimination associated with cancer genetic testing.





Cancer Genetic Counseling Program

The issues and psychological impact of genetic testing are unique, and the decision to undergo genetic testing can be a difficult one.

Genetic counselors help patients sort through complex medical information, ethical issues and the practical concerns involved in genetic testing.

Genetic counseling is non-directive; we support our patients' decisions.

To schedule a genetic counseling appointment, call the program office at 703-970-3209.

Cancer genetic counseling services are provided by a board-certified genetic counselor.

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Inova Health System is a not-for-profit healthcare system based in Northern Virginia that consists of hospitals and other health services, including emergency- and urgent- care centers, home care, nursing homes, mental health and blood donor services, and wellness classes. Governed by a voluntary board of community members, Inova's mission is to improve the health of the diverse community it serves through excellence in patient care, education and research. Inova provides a healthy environment for its patients, families, visitors, staff and physicians by prohibiting tobacco use on its campuses.

inova.org



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