

INTERVIEW WITH BRITTANY GILLIES, GENETIC COUNSELLOR.



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SPECIALTY AREA:

Hereditary Cancer Risk & Genetic Counselling

KEY FOCUS:

Supporting patients and families through the genetic testing process

WHO THIS IS FOR:

- Individuals with a family history of cancer
- Patients diagnosed with rare or early-onset cancers
- Anyone considering or undergoing genetic testing

KEY TAKEAWAYS:

- Genetic counsellors help you understand inherited cancer risk and testing options
- Results can guide early detection, treatment, or prevention for you and your family

Read the whole interview here:

WHAT IS IT THAT YOU ENJOY ABOUT GENETIC COUNSELLING?

"I love the family aspect – once a mutation is found there can be a big impact on families. Even when we have to deliver difficult news to a patient that a gene mutation was identified, there is hope that we can provide. I hold onto the positive impacts there are, such as targeted therapies, screening to detect cancer earlier, or risk reduction to lower the chances of developing cancer. These options can be extremely helpful, and even life-saving, for patients and their family members. I appreciate being able to develop relationships with families as a whole and seeing first hand the impact of genetic testing".

ARE THERE IMPORTANT QUESTIONS YOU GET ASKED AS A GENETIC COUNSELLOR?

"Patients might wonder if they have to pay for genetic testing. If individuals meet certain eligibility criteria, then testing is funded under OHIP.

Patients often ask if there could be insurance or employment discrimination. "There is a law – the Genetic Non-discrimination Act, GNA for short – that makes it illegal for third parties, such as employers and insurance companies, to ask for your genetic test results."

Patients might ask about how to share the information with family members about a mutation. We provide patients with a family letter and our clinic referral form to help arrange genetic counselling for relatives".

WHAT PART DOES MOLECULAR PATHOLOGY PLAY IN GENETIC COUNSELING?

"Pathology has a big impact on our work through tumour testing and immunohistochemistry protein expression (IHC). Molecular pathology aids in accurate diagnoses and may point to treatment options, such as targeted therapies in oncology. Genetic counsellors communicate with pathologists to request that certain tests be performed or to ask for expertise in reviewing complicated pathology reports".

WALK ME THROUGH A TYPICAL DAY AS A GENETIC COUNSELLOR.

"One thing I love about being a genetic counsellor is the breadth of our role and the opportunities to get involved in various areas depending on your interest. For me, I typically see between 2-5 patients a day. Most are over the phone but can also be done by video if the patient requests. Then a portion of time is spent doing paperwork such as consent forms and requisitions, and medical writing including chart notes, letters to patients and physicians, referrals, and educational materials for patients. As we often see people with rare cancers or syndromes, we also spend a lot of time preparing for cases including reviewing literature and medical records. Some of my more specific areas of interest include spending time on research, supervision of genetic counselling students, and my involvement with Cancer Care Ontario to update the genetic testing eligibility criteria".