

ISSUE

16

SEPTEMBER
2025

Official Newsletter
of the Pennsylvania
Association of
Genetic Counselors

PAGC News

The PAGC
Newsletter is brought
to you by members of
the PAGC Membership
Committee

Susan Walther, MS, CGC

Alyson Floyd MS, CGC

Amy Kunz, MS, CGC

Rebecca Oberschmidt, MS, CGC

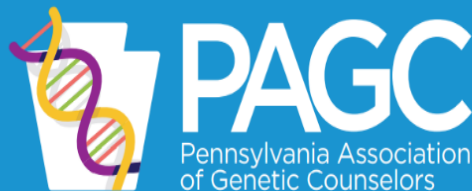
Cassy Gulden, MS, CGC

Mollie Cochran

If you have anything that you
would like to share, including
upcoming events, seminars,
topics of interest to GCs, etc.,
please contact us at:
PAGCmembership@gmail.com

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2021 Arch Street
Philadelphia, PA 19103

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Congratulations to our new and incumbent board members for the 2026-2027 term

President: Cassidi Kalejta

Vice President: Gabrielle Shermanski

Treasurer: Alyson Evans Floyd

Secretary: Dana Farengo-Clark

East Representative: Shannon Terek

West Representative: Kelsey Bohnert

A record number of PAGC members voted in this election cycle. Thank you!

SAVE THE DATES

PAGC ANNUAL CONFERENCE

March 26-27, 2026

in Harrisburg

additional details coming soon

PAGC EXECUTIVE BOARD MEMBERS

President:

Cassidi Kalejta, MS, CGC

Vice President:

Gabrielle Shermanski, MS, CGC

Secretary:

Dana Farengo-Clark, MS, CGC

Treasurer:

Alyson Evans Floyd, MS, CGC

East Regional Rep:

Heather Rocha, MS, CGC

West Regional Rep:

Kelsey Bohnert, MS, CGC

Past President:

Juliann McConnell, MS, CGC

DO YOU RECERTIFY IN 2025?

SUBMISSION OF CEUs TO ABGC IS DUE DECEMBER 31

Featured GC: *Shannon Terek, MS, CGC*

NSGC 2025 Award for Outstanding Volunteer



CONGRATULATIONS!

Genetic Counseling Program: Long Island University

Year of graduation: 2021

Current Employer: Children's Hospital of Philadelphia

What attracted you to pursue a career in genetic counseling?

It might be cliché, but I fell in love with genetics in middle school when I first learned about Punnett Squares. After learning about these cool little statistical tools, I went home and Googled jobs that involved genetics and stumbled upon genetic counseling! It seemed like the perfect fit of heavy science and interpersonal skills that could allow me to combine the things I would most want out of a future job.

While I did take a side bar and considered a pre-med route through high school and undergrad, after coming back to genetics my senior year of undergrad while working with CRISPR, I knew I wanted to pursue my original dream career of genetic counseling. I loved the fact that I could be an expert in the field of genetics, provide education to both patients and providers alike, all while being a part of an ever evolving and growing area of science. While I'm (sadly) not working with Punnett Squares daily, the field definitely turned out to be everything I hoped it would be and more.

What are your responsibilities in your current position?

I am currently a research/laboratory genetic counselor at the Center for Applied Genomics (CAG) at the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP). When it comes to the laboratory side of things, I aid in the management of several clinical tests we offer at CAG such as our clinical vascular anomalies panel and WES/WGS. Lab responsibilities involve working with sample processing, data/variant analysis, and report writing. I've also been involved with helping to create new tests at CAG, designing workflows, and aiding in tracking of all tests. As for the research side of my job, I've been involved with several research projects that have come through CAG. The biggest project I've worked on recently is with the eMERGE Network where we are evaluating best practices on returning PRS based reports to patient and providers. Over the past few years with this project, I've been involved with the recruitment and return of results for patients, creation of EMR based tools for providers, various interview studies of both patients and providers on the utility of this test, and now outcomes analysis of data generated from this study. Essentially, my day-to-day changes based on what tests are being offered and what research is currently being conducted by our team!

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How have you seen opportunities for genetic counselors evolve during the course of your career?

While I haven't been a practicing GC too long, I will say that working in the research side of things has really opened my eyes to the many ways genetic counselors can be involved in any aspect of medicine. Our voices and experiences do matter, and it's refreshing to see so many GCs think outside of the "traditional" roles and pave ways to really be leaders in the field. It's exciting to think about other opportunities that may arise as technology advances. Additionally, I've had opportunities to be involved with the planning of the PAGC annual educational conference the last four years and new this year, the NSGC conference. It's also been really eye opening seeing how GCs are constantly growing, advancing, and redefining what a GC can do.

While I've been in the same position since becoming a GC, volunteering with both PAGC and NSGC has really opened up opportunities for me that have allowed me to grow into my role as a GC. I started volunteering with both organizations after starting my job at CHOP. As mentioned with PAGC, I've worked on the educational committee. With NSGC, I started volunteering with the Awards Committee, and since then have volunteered on the CEU, abstract, annual conference planning, and Audrey Heimler Special Projects Award committees and with the Research SIG as the Grant Committee Chair. Serving on all of these committee has given me the opportunities to meet so many GCs, strengthen my leadership skills, learn about new opportunities in the field, and gain exposure to ideas that I can bring back to my current role. I truly believe that all of these opportunities have helped to get me where I currently am and will continue to open new doors for me as I continue in my career.

What "I wish I knew then what I know now" advice would you give to recent GC grads?

Say yes to new opportunities but also don't be afraid to say no or change your mind. While I do think it's important to try new things, take on new opportunities that may arise, and put yourself out there, not everything will be a great fit and that's okay! It's very easy as a newer GC to try to please everyone, but it's so important to also know what your likes and strengths are and take them into consideration. There's been plenty times at work where I said yes, and quickly realized that it was not the best fit for me and that task would be better suited for someone else. Same goes with volunteering, I've said yes, realized that committee is not something I'm super passionate about and then after fulfilling my commitment, stepped away from that committee. No one will fault you for advocating for yourself and knowing your limits. Don't be afraid to take that chance, but also, it's okay if it does not work out. Your career is what you make of it, and it's important to do things that make you happy.

Connect with PAGC!

**Follow Pennsylvania Association of Genetic Counselors/PAGC
on social media**

Twitter/X, Facebook, Instagram

LinkedIn coming soon

*The STORY of TWINS EXCHANGED at BIRTH
and the POWER of NATURE and NURTURE*

Accidental Brothers



Book Review: *Accidental Brothers: The Story of Twins Exchanged at Birth and the Power of Nature and Nurture*
by Nancy Segal and Yesika Montoya

Reviewed by: Amy Kunz, MS, CGC

Is there anything more interesting than the stories of twins separated at birth? This phenomenon is not as rare as one might believe, and Dr. Nancy Segal has made it her career to study the cases of reunited twins and all they can teach us about nature, nurture, and what determines the person each of us becomes.

Accidental Brothers tells the unlikely story of two sets of identical Colombian twin brothers who discovered at age 25 that they were mistakenly raised as fraternal twins — when they were not even biological brothers — as well as learning of the existence of an identical brother that they never met. Presumably due to a mix up at a hospital NICU, the separated twins were raised in starkly different environments: one pair in the bustling capital city of Bogotá with access to education and opportunity; the other in the remote farming village of La Paz where residents rarely received more than an elementary school education.

Dr. Segal describes how each of the switched twins seemed to have stark contrasts in their personalities and interests from that of their “virtual twin” (her term for same-age unrelated siblings reared together from infancy who replicate twinship, but without the genetic relatedness) or the family members that raised them despite growing up in the same environment. Conversely, we see how “nature” can drive one’s truest self all the while running up against life circumstances that end up shaping one’s destiny.

Finally, she points out the almost mystical power surrounding twins that she alludes to being built into their shared genetic blueprint. “While William [one of the boys] is good at reading other people’s thoughts and feelings, he is less understanding of Wilber [his mistaken virtual twin] whereas other people like Wilber’s newly found twin, Carlos [his true identical sibling] understand him much better. The real reared-apart twins share an understanding without explanation, the finest kind there is.”

I picked up this book because reared apart twin studies are amongst some of the most informative (but also ethically controversial) research we have into the nature versus nurture age-old debate that entangles so much of biological and psychological science. Dr. Segal primarily comments on the social and psychological observations amongst the switched twin pairs rather than highlighting any medically relevant genetic findings. If you are looking to learn more about the heritability of certain health traits, as many genetic counselors would be, then you could be disappointed by her version of this story. However, if one has an interest in how our DNA can have its influences beyond our health — such as our personality, perspectives, and attitudes — then consider delving into Dr. Segal’s collection of works.



President of PAGC: Cassidi Kalejta, MS, CGC

Accomplishments at the State Level for Genetic Counseling

As I reflect on the past two years serving as president of the Pennsylvania Association of Genetic Counselors (PAGC), I'm incredibly proud of the past and present momentum that continues to build with all of your support. Guided by our mission to champion quality genetic counseling services in Pennsylvania, we've strengthened education, professional development, and communication among members while fostering meaningful alliances across the state.

This year brought exciting progress – most notably, the introduction of the bill package to the Senate that includes genetic test ordering privileges within our state license laws. We also continue to find mechanisms to grow our membership and have been dedicated to a more robust social media presence to engage more fully and transparently with our community.

Looking ahead, we will continue to expand advocacy efforts, support students and counselors at any stage in their career, and highlight the vital role of genetic counseling in patient care. Thank you for being a part of this journey – your energy and commitment make PAGC the vibrant, forward-looking community it is today.

The Evolving Landscape of Genetic Counseling Careers

Mollie Cochran, Thomas Jefferson University Second Year Genetic Counseling Student

For current students, new graduates, and experienced genetic counselors alike, today's job market can be a source of stress and uncertainty. Historically, the genetic counseling job market has moved through cycles of growth followed by increased competition, influenced by advances in genetic testing, changes in service delivery, and economic factors. Still, long-term projections for the field remain positive, with predicted 9% growth from 2024 to 2034, which is faster than the average for all occupations.¹ With roughly 25% of genetic counselors working in non-direct patient care roles such as those in laboratories and industry,² it is increasingly valuable for job-seekers at all stages to consider “nontraditional” roles. Industry employers include pharmaceutical, biotechnology, digital health, and insurance companies. Diverse opportunities exist even within genetic testing laboratories specifically, spanning variant interpretation, reporting, case management, test development, marketing, research, and leadership.³ Genetic counselors are strong communicators who bring many transferable skills to the industry space, from critical thinking and problem-solving to empathy.⁴ Examples of other non-direct care roles include patient advocacy, policy development, public health, and clinical research. As the market evolves and genetic counselors enter new positions in direct and non-direct care settings, we must continue advocating for retention, growth, and broader recognition of our skills.

1. Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor. (2025, August 28). *Genetic Counselors*. Occupational Outlook Handbook. <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/healthcare/genetic-counselors.htm>
2. National Society of Genetic Counselors. (2024). *2024 Professional Status Survey*. <https://www.nsgc.org/Policy-Research-and-Publications/Professional-Status-Survey>
3. Cho, M. T., & Guy, C. (2020). Evolving roles of genetic counselors in the clinical laboratory. *Cold Spring Harbor Perspectives in Medicine*, 10(10). <https://doi.org/10.1101/cshperspect.a036574>
4. Haverty, C., & Ahlawat, N. (2023). From genetic counseling to product management: Five transferable skills. *NSGC Perspectives*. <https://www.nsgc.org/Newsroom/Blog>

NSGC Town Hall & Annual Business Meeting

Presented by: NSGC President Sara Pirzadeh-Miller, the NSGC Board of Directors, and Megan Herber from Faegre Drinker, August 27, 2025 (virtually)

Summarized by: Cassy Gulden, MS, CGC

Sara and the Board of Directors reviewed the proposed changes to bylaws, and NSGC members were able to vote. The presenters went on to share some policies that NSGC is making a priority over the next few years. These policies were divided into four main areas: testing, research, AI, and telehealth. Specific focuses include support and growth for pharmacogenetic practices in the US, support for clinical research infrastructure, opposition to policies that undermine DEI, support for AI in genetic testing analysis but to also recognize its limitations, and support for making Medicare telehealth flexibilities permanent.

Government Affairs Updates

Megan Herber from Faegre Drinker reviewed the need for and importance of patients having access to genetic counselors. As we know, genetic counselors help patients understand the increasingly complex world of genetic testing. Genetic counselors also help provide cost savings to healthcare by ordering the most appropriate tests, among many other things. Therefore, we need and deserve recognition by Medicare. We need the Access to Genetic Counselor Services Act to be passed by Congress. Megan reported that there has been significant progress in engaging stakeholders. One major update is that the American College of Medical Genetics now supports the Access to Genetic Counselor Services Act! Also, there are over 500 signatures of support for the act from academic medical centers, clinical groups, graduate programs, health systems/hospitals, industry, patient groups, and genetic counselors. Megan and NSGC are engaged with other clinician organizations to ensure support or neutrality- AMA, ACOG, AAP, ACC, AAFP, AAN.

Additionally, updating the bill's language is ongoing based on other professions that have been successful with similar bills. Congressional champions have been identified, including Sen Barrasso (R-MT) and Reps. Smith (R-NE) and Castor (D-FL). They need to secure a new Senate Democrat champion. There is a meeting with CMS to get advice and support. On Capitol Hill Day, 11 NSGC board members met with 17 congressional offices. Megan and NSGC wrote letters to HHS secretary Kennedy and CMS administrator Oz. **What are the next steps? Bill introduction is planned for early fall- please stay tuned for announcements from NSGC about how members can help!**

Payor Education Project

NSGC is conducting an ongoing payor education project related to coverage of genetic counseling and CPT code 96041. An assessment was complete of commercial payors' coverage policies. Outreach to six major commercial payors is ongoing. There were meetings with state Medicaid agencies, including local genetic counselors, in 10 states with the goal of promoting policy and payment changes that would improve coverage of GC services through Medicaid in those states. There will be a meeting with the National Association of Medicaid Directors (NAMd) with the learnings and to help raise the profile of GCs. NSGC continues to work with states to get licensure. Over 2/3 of states have licensure laws so they are looking into interstate license portability options. Nearly 20 professions have created interstate compacts to facilitate interstate practice. NSGC is looking into the time and money investment this effort would take.

GENETIC COUNSELOR APPRECIATION DAY
NOVEMBER 13, 2025



PAGC Committees

Volunteers are always welcome!

Contact committee chair if you are interested in being involved

Education

Chairs:

Lucy Galea (lucygalea@gmail.com)

Madalyn Charnego (MAC580@pitt.edu)



Planning for the annual conference is underway for speakers, events, sponsors, and vendors. Please contact the committee chair to be involved in the planning, abstract review, or volunteering for on-site logistics.

***SAVE THE DATES: Annual Conference
March 26-27, 2026 in Harrisburg***

Professional Issues

Chair: Becky Belles (rsbelles@geisinger.edu)



- Work to update GC licensure in PA
- Examine barriers to credentialing of GCs in PA
- Create awareness of healthcare bills being considered in PA legislature

Genetic Services

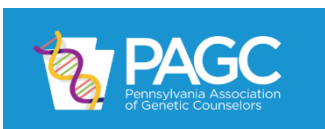
Chair: Gabby Shermanski (gtshermanski@geisinger.edu)

- Design and implement Pennsylvania Professional Status Survey
- Evaluate and promote GC services in PA
- Create social media content



Membership

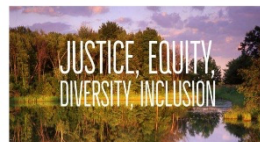
Chair: Susan Walther (susanwalther1203@gmail.com)



- Maintain PAGC website content
- Create e-blast communications
- Manage registration for annual conference
- Develop articles for PAGC newsletter

Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion

Chairs: Kelsey Bohnert (kelsey.bohnert@chp.edu) and
Aaron Baldwin (aaron.baldwin@penmedicine.upenn.edu)



This committee will be working on developing a recorded webinar series, as well as partnering with high schools and genetic counseling programs to increase high school students' exposure to the field of genetic counseling through the creation of a toolkit. Please contact the committee chairs for more information or to express your interest in joining the committee.