

TESTIMONY

SB 370 AN ACT CONCERNING SERVICES PROVIDED BY GENETIC COUNSELORS

Public Health Committee
March 16, 2012

Senator Gerratana, Representative Ritter, Senator Welch, Representative Perillo, distinguished members of the Public Health committee:

Thank you for providing the opportunity to submit testimony on behalf of The Hospital of Central Connecticut (HOCC). The genetic counselors at our institution play a critical role in the care of our patients, in the cancer center and the maternal fetal medicine department. HOCC fully supports the efforts of the genetic counselors in Connecticut to become licensed providers.

Genetic counseling is the process of helping people understand and adapt to the medical, psychological and familial implications of genetic contributions to disease. This process integrates: interpretation of family and medical histories to assess the chance of disease occurrence or recurrence; education about inheritance, testing, management, prevention, resources and research; and, counseling to promote informed choices and adaptation to the risk or condition.

The genetic counselors in the George Bray Cancer Center work closely with a multidisciplinary team which includes oncologists, surgeons, pathologists, navigators, and others. Their training and expertise bring together advanced molecular genetics knowledge with family- and patient-centered care. They have, through their training, the ability to explain complicated scientific information in a way that is meaningful for patients in order to understand their cancer risks and options for cancer risk reduction.

The prenatal genetic counselor works closely with the maternal fetal medicine department to assess the risk of genetic syndromes. The counselor provides assessment, recurrence risks, information about the natural history of a particular disease, identifies resources for patients and families, and acts as a patient advocate. This counselor also interacts with many different providers in the healthcare team and brings a unique skill set to this team.

Only masters-level genetic counselors focus on coursework and clinical training dedicated solely to genetics and counseling. They are trained in accredited institutions, must pass national certification exams and must remain current in their continuing education. I believe that recognition of the professional status of genetic counselors is very important to help ensure that consumers know when they are being counseled by a genetic counselor and when they are not.

At HOCC, we are in full support of evaluation of the determination of scope of practice for genetic counselors according to Public Act 11 -209, with the ultimate goal of granting licensure to genetic counselors in the State of Connecticut. While SB 370 may be a first step in this

process, we are concerned that the language limits our genetic counseling program's ability to practice in the multidisciplinary way that has been so successful.

Sincerely,

Steven D. Hanks, M.D., MMM, FACP, FFSMB
Executive Vice President and Chief Medical Officer