

BRANCHING OUT TO OTHER HEALTH PROFESSIONALS

Genetics, Behavioral Science Shake Hands

Rob Pilarski, MS & June Peters, MS

Behavioral Sciences and Genetics: *New Roles, New Partners*, an innovative NIH-funded workshop held last fall, was developed by the Advisory Council on Cancer Genetics of the American Psychological Association to promote multidisciplinary collaborations between the biomedical and behavioral sciences communities. The invited participants, all involved in cancer centers and/or cancer genetics programs, included seven genetic counselors and nearly 20 social scientists and psychologists. The goal was to increase mutual understanding and respect and to foster future research collaborations.

Research was presented on key issues such as: how self-perceived social support may impact on reactions to genetic testing; how families live with inherited disease; what people bring psychologically and culturally to the genetic counseling session; what actually "happens" in clinics and how people understand risk.

One expert felt that future fundable research in the behavioral sciences needs to be geared toward areas such as discourse analysis, decision-making models and predictors of adherence to screening recommendations. Studies on patient characteristics such as attitudes, motivation, persuasion and comprehension of information could inform our understanding of provider-patient interactions and the informed consent process.

This meeting was especially unique and successful in that it offered two experiential exercises: conducting a qualitative research study or working in small multidisciplinary groups to develop and write mock grant proposals. Results of these workshops were then

reviewed by potential funders who provided feedback.

We were quite impressed with the interest shown by psychologists and behavioral scientists in the field of cancer genetics, and especially the opportunities it presents for collaborations between our disciplines. ♦

GENETIC SERVICES OUTREACH IN VIRGINIA

Lorna Phelps, MS and Joann Bodurtha, MD, MPH

We received a grant from the Division of Women's and Infants' Health, Virginia Department of Health, to develop a human genetics continuing education program specifically designed for personnel in state health departments. A needs assessment and resulting workshop were conducted by the Department of Human Genetics at the Medical College of Virginia Campus of Virginia Commonwealth University.

NEEDS ASSESSMENT

We started with a genetic services needs assessment survey. Fifty-three surveys were mailed to Nurse Managers in each health district of the Virginia Department of Health (DOH) and Children's Specialty Services (CSS) Coordinators across the state. Of those, 37 were returned, a response rate of 70%. Fifty-seven percent of respondents to the survey felt that the genetic services needs of their patients were mostly or completely being met.

Barriers to accessing genetic services most often mentioned were:

- costs of services
- culture
- distance to genetic centers
- misinformation
- lack of transportation
- language

About 95% (35) of respondents said their agency's interest level for a genetics workshop was good to excellent, and they indicated their level of interest in various potential topics, including:

- referral processes
- ethical issues
- informational resources for families and providers
- prenatal diagnosis
- teratogens

GENETIC SERVICES WORKSHOP

We recruited speakers from across the state to maximize the networking opportunities. An information and registration flyer was mailed to about 800 state employees; 87 attended. The day-long conference consisted of plenary and break-out sessions.

EVALUATION

The participants all gave a satisfactory or above rating; many rated the workshop as excellent. Most of the participants anticipated making changes in their work setting as a result of what they learned. Several mentioned an increased awareness of making referrals to genetics. ♦