IN THIS ISSUE

Highlights of 2010/2011  1
Greetings  2
New Initiatives  2
2012 Scholarships  3
Mission Statement, Alumni Updates  6
Alumni Publications, 2011 Alumni Meeting  7
Stay in touch, Make a Gift  8

Highlights of 2010/2011

- Genetics and Medical Genetics at the University of Wisconsin-Madison celebrated important milestones; the centennial celebration of the founding of the Department of Genetics and the 50-year anniversary of the Department of Medical Genetics.
- There was a successful transition of the MS in Medical Genetics from the Laboratory of Genetics to the Department of Pediatrics.
- We developed a Mission Statement to guide the Program in future efforts and planning (see pg 6).
- We provided tuition assistance to incoming students through the Genetic Counselor Program Award Fund.
- Program graduates had a 90% pass rate on the 2010 certification exam and 100% in 2011. Nationally, the average pass rate was 75% and 74%, respectively. Great job grads!
- We completed our self-study for the ABGC reaccreditation site-visit that is scheduled for February 13 and 14, 2012.
- We welcomed Liz Petty, MD, most recently from the University of Michigan-Ann Arbor, to her new position as Associate Dean of Academic Affairs in the UW SMPH.
- Jess Scott-Schwoerer, MD completed her fellowship and is now working here at the Waisman Center as a Biochemical and General Geneticist.
- An agreement with the Center for Patient Partnership paved the way for GC student participation in their Certificate Program. To date, 6 GC students graduated with both their MS in Medical Genetics and a certificate in Patient Advocacy.
- The third biennial Adam Rennebohm Memorial Bereavement Program for GC students was held, which was attended by our students as well as the GC students from Northwestern and the University of Minnesota-Minneapolis. Plans for 2012 include broadening participation to other Allied Health Programs.
- There was increased use of interactive tele-presence technologies to enhance the curriculum and foster national collaborations. For example, Krista Redlinger Grosse, a certified GC and counseling psychology doctoral student, presented on “cognitive behavioral techniques-implications for GC” through video-conferencing. GC students in the Minnesota Program were present on-site in MN and UW GC students accessed the presentation remotely at the Health Science Learning Center.
- We hosted the 2011 Wisconsin Clinical Genetics Exchange which, for the first time, was held in conjunction with the graduating genetic counseling student’s research project report.
- We created a new website for the UW-Madison Program at www.med.wisc.edu/gc. Check it out!
Greetings from the Program Director

Dear Colleagues and Friends:

In the last issue of the GC News, I wished you all a “healthy, happy and productive” new year. I’m not sure if a Program can be happy, but healthy and productive—certainly! Check out the highlights of 2010/2011 and plans for 2012.

Happy New Year!

- Casey Reiser, MS, CGC

New Initiatives for 2012

• The Genetic Counselor Training Program Award Fund will be introduced with named scholarships honoring those colleagues who positively impacted Program development.

• While greater than 50% of student projects are published in peer reviewed sources, we will work towards increasing that number.

• We recognize the need for PhD trained researchers in the Genetic Counseling discipline. The Graduate Program in Clinical Investigation (GPCI) through the UW Institute for Clinical and Translational Research is designed for individuals interested in a research career in academia, industry, research institutes, health agencies, or regulatory agencies. According to the GPCI website the highly desired degrees include health professional degrees or, “… post-baccalaureate degree in a clinical or biomedical field.” We will formalize a pathway for our students to make the UW-Madison Genetic Counselor Training Program seen as an excellent choice for those applicants with research aspirations.

THE GC PROGRAM HONORS THOSE WHO HAVE DONE THE MOST!

Thanks to the generosity of several donors and with the help of the UW Foundation, a Genetic Counselor Training Program Award has been started. Five scholarships will be awarded each fall; scholarships are named for our colleagues through whose energy, dedication and support, the GC Program has achieved an excellent national reputation. We are proud to announce the following scholarships named for those who have done the most:

The Joan Burns Founder’s Scholarship

The Dr. Raymond Kessel Scholarship in Outreach

The Dr. Renata Laxova Scholarship in Patient Advocacy

The Dr. Richard Pauli Scholarship in Clinical Research

The Genetic Counselor Training Program Alumni Scholarship for Leadership

Please consider joining our alumni and friends in honoring our colleagues through scholarship support of our students. To make a gift in support of the Genetic Counselor Training Program Award or to discuss other philanthropic opportunities please contact:

Steven Ramig, Director of Development
Medical Advancement Group
University of Wisconsin Foundation
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Ms. Joan Burns, MS, MSSW, the founding program director of the Genetic Counselor Training program at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, has provided outstanding guidance and leadership for 25 graduating classes of genetic counselors. She started her career with a BA in zoology from Rutgers University. After working under the direction of Dr. James Crow, a national leader in genetics, Ms. Burns went on to complete a MA in zoology and genetics from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. While working as a manager of teaching assistants for the Genetics Department, her third child, Allison, was born with mental retardation. As such, Ms. Burns’ interests shifted; instead of zoology and basic genetics, she wanted to know the etiology of mental retardation, recurrence risks, and most importantly what services were available for families with a child with special needs. Finding a deficit of such services and the need for social workers dedicated to such families, Ms. Burns decided to pursue a MS in Social Work. During this time, she trained and worked at the Waisman Center with Dr. John Opitz, a leader in clinical genetics. As Ms. Burns worked with families with genetic diagnoses, she identified the need for other Master-level trained individuals with a strong working knowledge of genetics and counseling. Her goal was to help families understand and integrate the scientific information and emotional component surrounding a genetic diagnosis into their family story. Beyond that, her goal was to ensure that there were providers trained to provide these services. She advocated and support grew from the departments of Social Work and Genetics for a genetic counselor training program. The combination of Ms. Burns’ accomplishments, her interactions with other visionaries in the field of genetics, and her skills in advocacy led her to be identified as a natural leader for a newly developed Genetic Counselor program at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Many know Ms. Burns for her passion for helping families and her leadership style that combines identified needs with untapped resources. For example, as the program developed there was recognition that some of the coursework needed to be more tailored to the needs of the genetic counseling student. As such, coursework focusing on literature searches, medical genetics, and embryology was designed. Ms. Burns’ dedication to the program influenced others, which is seen in the significant contributions so many have made to the program. Her ability to identify a need and find a solution makes her a leader in the field of genetic counseling.

Ms. Burns’ hope for the future of the profession is that it continues to be recognized as integral to medicine and to the family experience. As information about genetic conditions and testing for such disease becomes more readily available, larger numbers of individuals are receiving genetic diagnoses, some with and some without the support of genetic counselors. Ms. Burns hopes that the medical community continues to recognize the value of the genetic counseling process as it helps families understand and integrate this complex and often emotion-laden information into their experience. As a founder and visionary for the field, she believes that the genetic counselor should not only think of the science behind the diagnosis but of the human experience.

The Dr. Raymond Kessel Scholarship in Outreach

For over 40 years, Dr. Raymond Kessel has been an influential figure within the Wisconsin genetics community. His history and relationship with the Genetic Counselor Training Program at UW-Madison is as interesting and varied as his life’s journey. Witness to discrimination and poverty of the apartheid of South Africa, his interests in helping and empowering others grew from an early age. He left his birth home of South Africa to complete his BS in Agricultural Science in Israel with his focus on the prevention of hunger. He earned his PhD. in genetics and plant breeding from the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 1972. His interests evolved from agricultural genetics to human genetics. He became committed to the prevention of mental retardation and the support of families with genetic conditions. He strived to help others understand the process and value of clinical genetics and genetic counseling. Combining this with his desires to make connections and his passion to help and empower others, he honed his skill as an outreach expert.

For Dr. Kessel, the goal of outreach is to recognize a need, identify a solution and then, together with the community and local people, facilitate the establishment of a program or clinic. The success of an outreach endeavor occurs when it becomes self-sufficient and independent. As part of his commitment to outreach, he always placed high value on education for children, students, and professionals. Genetic counseling students have worked under his mentorship teaching various genetics-related courses such as “Genetics of Breast Cancer” or “Genetics of Heart Disease.”
They have assisted in programs he established such as the community-based carrier screening program for Tay Sachs disease. Known by UW-Madison genetic counseling alumni and staff as an “ideas” person, Dr. Kessel is motivated to connect people with an expertise with those needing answers or help. He continually proved that excitement towards a concept is contagious. This philosophy was influential as he helped establish outreach genetics clinics across Wisconsin in Green Bay, La Crosse, Eau Claire, as well as Rockford, IL. Many of these clinics continue today and are now independent of their once necessary UW ties. He was also influential in the establishment of programs including the Statewide Genetics Services Network Project, the Wisconsin Indian Network for Genetic Services (WINGS), and the Wisconsin Teacher Enhancement in Biology (WisTEB) program. On a national level he established the Genetics Committees for the American Public Health Association. He helped to integrate clinical genetics into mainstream Maternal and Child Health programs of the State Department of Public Health. Dr. Kessel is passionate about the integration of clinical genetics into mainstream Health and Public Services; through outreach partnerships with local professionals and advocacy groups he ensured that this goal was met.

Due in large part to Dr. Kessel’s commitment to outreach, this once novel concept is now a commonplace component of the teaching of genetic counseling students. A hope that he has for past, present and future UW genetic counselor alumni is that they take an active role in genetics and bring their service and expertise to the people of their own community. Dr. Kessel claims that he never would have achieved success if not for the expertise of those around him, including the genetic counseling students, and their willingness to partner with those outreach programs.

The Dr. Renata Laxova Scholarship in Patient Advocacy

Dr. Renata Laxova is dedicated to clinical genetics and patient advocacy. It is no surprise when one learns even just a few details of her interesting life story. Because of the advocacy of those involved with the kindertransport, Dr. Laxova escaped from Czechoslovakia and the Holocaust and lived in Britain. Returning home later, she trained as a pediatrician and earned her PhD in Medical Genetics from Masaryk University in Brno, CZ. Genetics was a rather taboo topic in Eastern Europe, and with the invasion of her home country she once again escaped and left for Britain. There, working closely with Dr. Lionel Penrose, a leader in medical genetics and someone who advocated on her behalf, her interests and expertise in clinical genetics continued to strengthen. Upon moving to Madison, WI, she worked alongside the nationally recognized and celebrated geneticists, Dr. James Crow and Dr. John Opitz. In 1976, a formal training program for genetic counselors was established at UW-Madison. Given her experience and dedication, it was a natural fit for Dr. Laxova to become the first medical director of the UW-Madison Genetic Counselor Training Program and she served as such for over 20 years.

Although her knowledge and background in genetics is immense, she is well known and most appreciated for her role as a patient advocate. Her innate ability to make connections with patients and learn their “story” set her apart and strengthened her desire to advocate. As she recounted the family stories, such as their understanding of the etiology of the condition or the impact it had on them, Dr. Laxova would teach genetic counseling students genetics, but more importantly, the psychosocial impact of that condition. A phrase that one can remember Dr. Laxova asking during a clinic visit summarizes her passion for advocacy: “How can we most help you?” Her mentorship inspired genetic counseling students to complete research projects dedicated to patient advocacy. Working closely with others from fields such as social work, genetic counseling and nursing, at a time when community services were not as developed, diverse and available as today, Dr. Laxova and her team would make the seemingly impossible possible.

Significant advances in genetics and the availability and understanding of medical genetics have been made since Dr. Laxova began her career. Yet, as this field continues to evolve, Dr. Laxova has observed direct patient care with medical genetics dwindle and advocacy on behalf of the patient decrease. She worries about new trends like direct-to-consumer genetic testing and genetic tests being ordered for patients without being provided true informed consent. Her hope for past, current and future genetic counselors is to never forget the patient experience, which is most often a family experience. She has always recognized the value of the genetic counselor in relation to the patient and family. The need to make connections with, learn from and advocate on behalf of the patient is, in her opinion, even of greater importance today than in the past.
The Dr. Richard M. Pauli Scholarship in Clinical Research

Dr. Richard M. Pauli was involved with the Genetic Counselor Training program at the University of Wisconsin-Madison for 30 years, with nine of those years as Medical Director. He received a BA in zoology from Rutgers College, a PhD in Genetics and a MD from the University of Chicago, and trained at the Children's Hospital in Seattle and the University of Washington in Pediatrics and Medical Genetics. During his career as a medical geneticist at the University of Wisconsin, he established several clinical genetics programs including the Midwest Regional Bone Dysplasia Clinic and the Wisconsin Stillbirth Program. He provided medical care to thousands of patients with genetic conditions, published hundreds of articles related to clinical-based research, gave hundreds of educational lectures, received numerous awards and honors, and provided various services both at the State level and with various national groups such as Little People of America. His accomplishments are broad and deep.

Among genetic counseling students, Dr. Pauli is best known as a teacher and a mentor. Dr. Pauli mentored almost half of all graduates during his 30 years of involvement by serving as the research professor for over 60 second year research projects. As a mentor he hoped to provide an experience that was challenging and tailored to the student’s interests. The principle aim of these research experiences was to develop an appreciation of clinical research and to foster students’ self-confidence within this realm. Dr. Pauli excelled as a teacher and developed and taught several different courses related to medical genetics. A fundamental cornerstone of his teaching and mentoring was to encourage genetic counseling students to develop a pattern of thinking that is rigorous, analytical and critical. A prepared and competent genetic counselor is one who is not trained by memorizing facts, but rather someone who learns this method of critical thinking that allows him/her to comprehend the basics of science and details of genetic diseases and how this all relates to and can be applied to patient care.

Dr. Pauli argues that as the discipline of genetic counseling has evolved and become more specialized, day to day opportunities to learn about, discuss, collaborate on and debate scientific and clinical research have decreased. Ironically, there are now more funded positions for genetic counselors in clinical research than in the past and so the expectation of this knowledge remains. Therefore the teaching of clinical research and its role in the field of genetics and genetic counseling is still vitally important. Dr. Pauli hopes that for genetic counselors, both in practice and in training, there is continued emphasis on clinical research, and collaborative and non-hierarchical efforts between genetic counselors, scientists, medical doctors, and other health care professionals.

The Genetic Counselor Training Program Alumni Scholarship for Leadership

The alumni of the UW-Madison Genetic Counselor Training Program are a talented and accomplished group. Since the Program accepted its first class in 1978 there have been over 150 graduates who work in a variety of settings including clinical (pediatric, cancer, prenatal, cardiac and more), public health, research and industry. They are highly sought after by employers with, on average, approximately 3 weeks from graduation to employment. Many alumni continue research efforts post-graduation; our recent self-study in preparation for our reaccreditation site visit revealed that when examining publications in peer-reviewed journals and abstracts presented since 2004, over 70 references are listed. While most alumni continue working in the genetic counseling field as clinical counselors, several alumni have chosen to pursue advanced degrees (PhD, MD and JD); we are confident that their training as a genetic counselor added to their ability to succeed. In addition, several alumni have accepted leadership roles. They have served as co-chairs for the AEC on multiple occasions including for 2011 and the upcoming 2012 meeting. Approximately 16% of US accredited Genetic Counselor Training Programs are led by genetic counselors who graduated from our Program. The NSGC executive committee, the ABGC Board and numerous statewide committees have benefitted from their expertise and energy. Alumni both close to Madison and afar contribute to the Program by teaching and mentoring current classes, a contribution that many students have appreciated and utilized as they transition from student to genetic counselor.

The statistics continue but the point is clear; UW-Madison Genetic Counselor alumni as a group are influential within the genetics community. The Program is proud of their accomplishments, future endeavors and how they give back to community they serve.
To Guide Our Future: Our Mission

We recognized that the Program needed a mission statement to help guide our future plans and endeavors. The statement below was derived following review of the statements of our various partners including the SMPH, the Graduate School, the Department of Pediatrics, the Waisman Center, the NSGC and the ABGC. The statement will be instrumental as we plan our future course. Any comments are welcome; please send directly to Casey Reiser at reiser@pediatrics.wisc.edu.

Mission Statement

The mission of the Genetic Counselor Training Program at the University of Wisconsin-Madison is to educate competent and compassionate genetic counselors who will successfully enter the Genetic Counseling workforce and be lifelong learners and leaders in the field. To fulfill this mission the Program will provide students with a rigorous, comprehensive curriculum that includes:

1. A diverse clinical experience that fosters interdisciplinary relationships

2. Relevant research opportunities that encourage critical thinking and contribute to the knowledge base of the profession

3. An environment that promotes socially responsible practice

ALUMNI UPDATES

We love to hear updates from UW-Madison alumni. Please consider sharing any professional updates (e.g. new jobs, honors, memberships, publications, etc.), any personal updates (weddings, births, etc.) as well as any current photos of alumni by emailing Laura Birkeland at lebirkeland@pediatrics.wisc.edu.

- Congratulations to Amy White (2002) and Sonja Henry (2002) for having their abstract titled, “Unexpected Outcomes in Our Ten Year Experience of Tandem Mass Spectrometry (MS/MS) Newborn Screening in Wisconsin (2000-2010)” accepted and presented as a poster at the 2011 AEC.

- Thanks to Elizabeth “Beth” Wood Denne (2000) for her role as the Co-Chair of the 2010 AEC and Chair of the 2011 AEC.

- Thanks to Cecelia Bellcross, PhD (1990) and Emily Windsor (2008) and for their roles as an Abstract Reviewer and Subcommittee Chair for the 2011 AEC.

- Congratulations to Quinn Stein (2000) who has been appointed the Co-Chair for 2012 AEC in Boston.

- We wish Lindsay Zetzsche (2004) the best as she embarks on a new position as a lab genetic counselor at Mayo Clinic in Rochester, MN.

- Kudos to Kate Murphy-Orland (2008) for helping to create and secure a job as a genetic counselor within the Inherited Arrhythmias Clinic at UW-Madison.

- The first annual Genetics Clinic Cookie Exchange was held at the Waisman Center. Thanks to Nikki Drillas, RD, Biochemical Dietician, for organizing.

- Congratulations to Casey Reiser (1980) for receiving the JEMF award for her proposed project “Development of Educational Resources for Genetic Counseling Students, Practicing Genetic Counselors and Students in Other Health Professions Using Digital Recordings of Genetic Counseling Sessions by Master Genetic Counselors.” She completed this project this past summer. Resources and recordings are available on-line at NSGC under Education Opportunities for CEUs (JEMF Master Genetic Counselor Series) and under Career Exploration for prospective students.

- Congratulations to the class of 2011! All graduates secured employment by the end of the summer. Jennifer Hesemann (2011) and Emily Lauer (2011) are
Annual Alumni Gathering at the 2011 NSGC Annual Education Meeting

The AEC for 2011 was a success! Although we were all busy attending the various meetings, we did have time for a casual gathering of alumni at a local pub allowing for new connections, walks down memory lane and an overall good time. Look for flyers on the Message board about time and location for next year’s AEC UW Alumni reunion.

2011 Alumni Publications

Although not a comprehensive list by any means, UW Alumni have been busy this past year. Keep up the great work! Please keep us posted of any new publications by emailing Laura Birkeland at lebirkeland@pediatrics.wisc.edu.


Stay in touch and Happy New Year!

We would love to hear from you. Please stay in touch via:

Facebook: UW Genetic Counselor Training Program Alumni
Website: www.med.wisc.edu/gc
Email: reiser@pediatrics.wisc.edu or lebirkeland@pediatrics.wisc.edu
Mail: Waisman Center, 1500 Highland Ave, Madison, WI 53705
Phone: 608-262-9722

Make a Gift

Your gift to the Genetic Counseling Masters Program Award Fund will help us fulfill our mission of training competent and compassionate genetic counselors who will be lifelong learners and leaders in the field.

This fund was created to support the genetic counseling master's program. It will provide tuition assistance that will allow students to choose the University of Wisconsin-Madison for their graduate training in genetic counseling.

Genetic counselors help individuals and families sort through critical health issues. In a rapidly expanding field, they play an increasing role in research and public health. The University of Wisconsin-Madison Genetic Counseling Master's Program is committed to preparing genetic counselors who will help families and help shape the future of genomic medicine.

Gifts to the Genetic Counseling Masters Program Award Fund are administered through the University of Wisconsin Foundation, the official fundraising and gift-receiving organization for the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

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Address ____________________________________________________________ State ________ Zip__________
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To make a gift online, visit www.uwfoundation.wisc.edu