

Genetic Counseling Referral Information for Patients

As part of your care, your doctor recommends that you talk to a genetic counselor in the William G. Rohrer Cancer Genetics Program about your personal and/or family history of cancer. Your referral was made because the reported history has one or more features of hereditary cancer, such as an earlier than average age at cancer diagnosis or multiple family members with the same or related types of cancers on the same side of the family.

However, this referral does not mean that the cancer in your family is in fact hereditary. Most cancer is not hereditary, but rather may occur by chance, increasing age or medical, environmental or lifestyle factors. Only 5 to 10% of cancers are hereditary. Hereditary cancers develop due to a gene mutation that is present from birth. Usually, the mutation was passed from a mother or father to a child.

During your Cancer Genetics Program appointment, a genetic counselor will review your personal and family history with regard to cancer. If possible, it is helpful to bring specific information about your family history of cancer to this appointment. This includes where in the body each cancer started and the ages of family members when these cancers were diagnosed. You are also encouraged to find out if other family members have already undergone genetic testing due to a personal and/or family history of cancer. If so, please bring either a copy of the result(s) to your appointment or bring information about what genes were studied and the outcome of the testing.

If your history suggests the cancer in your family may be hereditary, you may decide whether or not to have genetic testing. The genetic counselor will answer your questions about genetic testing and will help you to make an informed decision. You may see the genetic counselor and then decide not to have genetic testing.

Genetic testing involves taking a blood or saliva sample. The results of genetic testing typically take over a month to become available. These results may:

- Help your doctor manage your cancer (if you have been diagnosed with cancer).
- Show if you have a higher than usual chance of developing certain types of cancer (or another cancer).
- Help family members to know if they have a higher than usual chance of developing certain types of cancer.

If you or your family members are found to have an increased chance of developing cancer due to a hereditary cancer syndrome, doctors may recommend steps to manage these risks with increased screening, early detection and/or risk-reduction measures.

Please note that health insurance companies may cover most, if not all, of the cost of genetic testing on a case-by-case basis.

If you are not able to return to MD Anderson Cancer Center at Cooper for genetic counseling, we recommend that you meet with a genetic counselor where you live. Your local doctor may be able to refer you to a genetics counselor or you may locate cancer genetic counseling providers in your area through these resources:

- The Human Genetics Association of New Jersey at www.hganj.org.
- The National Society of Genetic Counselors at www.nsgc.org.
- The National Cancer Institute at www.cancer.gov/search/geneticsservices.