



Under Embargo Until:

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Penn Medicine Awarded \$9.7 Million from The Warren Alpert Foundation for Genetic Counselor Continuing Education Efforts

Penn Medicine will sub-award portion of the grant to four other institutions to collectively create a state-of-the-art online courses for genetic counselors

PHILADELPHIA— Penn Medicine has received a \$9.7 million grant from [The Warren Alpert Foundation](#) (WAF) that will fund continuing education efforts for genetic counselors, to ensure opportunities for continued training that will keep them on the leading edge of their profession interpreting genomic data and explaining its implications to patients. This grant will position genetic counselors to advance research to address the many critical questions in the implementation of genomic information into clinical practice.

Spearheaded by genetics researchers and faculty members in the Perelman School of Medicine (PSOM) at the University of Pennsylvania, the WAF-Career Ladder Education Program for Genetic Counseling program will allow genetic counselors to continue their education and learn about new and emerging research trends. This advanced training will further inform their work helping individuals learn about specific hereditary disorders, assess risks, and make proactive decisions in areas from cancer prevention to family planning. Penn will lead these efforts, in close collaboration with four other leading institutions: Baylor College of Medicine, Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine, Vanderbilt University School of Medicine, and the University of Washington School of Medicine.

According to the [U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistic](#), the genetics counseling field is expected to see rapid growth over the next decade. To enter the field, genetic counselors typically must complete a bachelors degree and a masters degree related to the field. However, unlike other health professions, there are currently few opportunities to formally continue and advance their training with this career. “Genetic counseling is only about 50 years old, and the world of genetics is moving at lightning speed. It can be challenging for genetic counselors to stay aware of the rapid changes in the field—especially for those based at smaller, community hospitals. It is vital for the field to keep genetic counselors on the forefront of research and education, and initiatives like this help to ensure genetic counselors are an integral part of the future of genomic medicine,” said [Kathleen Valverde, PhD, LCGC](#), director of [Penn’s Master of Science in Genetic Counseling Program](#).

The grant funds the newly created WAF-Career Ladder Education Program for Genetic Counseling at Penn, which aims to drive continued education for genetic counselors through multiple pathways. This includes the creation of a state-of-the-art online continuing education unit (CEU) courses for genetic counselors. Each one-credit CEU course will contain 10 hours of instruction, lectures, activities, and assessments to provide in-depth coverage on designated topics in genomics and personalized medicine

such as variant interpretation. Other initiatives include developing a certificate program with targeted area of advanced training, and pathways for the development of a post-graduate doctoral degree in genetic counseling, are being explored.

“Genetic counselors are crucial for all aspects of genomic medicine, including molecular diagnostics, clinical genetics, and genomics research, and are essential to modern health care systems. Creating a robust career ladder to support genetic counselors’ advanced training and professional development is critical in retaining genetic counselors in academic health systems, advancing genomics research, and implementing genomic information into clinical practice,” said [Daniel Rader, MD](#), chair of Genetics and Chief of Translational Medicine and Human Genetics at Penn. “This commitment to the career development of genetic counselors will be transformational, not just at the five participating institutions but also nationally and globally.”

PSOM will partner with four other institutions around the nation: Baylor College of Medicine, Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine, Vanderbilt University School of Medicine, and the University of Washington School of Medicine. These institutions, along with Penn, represent geographically diverse areas of the United States, and were chosen as recipients of a portion of the WAF grant money based on their clinical programs in genetics and genomics expertise, their existing genetic counseling masters programs, and their history of engaging in research. The five institutions will work together to create and offer programs and opportunities for genetic counselors to advance their skills.

“Given the increasing complexity of career development and the expanded roles for genetic counselors, support in career development is imperative. We are excited to support the career ladder for genetic counselors and we are delighted to award Penn this grant,” said August Schiesser, WAF executive director.

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Penn Medicine is one of the world’s leading academic medical centers, dedicated to the related missions of medical education, biomedical research, and excellence in patient care. Penn Medicine consists of the [Raymond and Ruth Perelman School of Medicine at the University of Pennsylvania](#) (founded in 1765 as the nation’s first medical school) and the [University of Pennsylvania Health System](#), which together form a \$9.9 billion enterprise.

The Perelman School of Medicine has been ranked among the top medical schools in the United States for more than 20 years, according to U.S. News & World Report’s survey of research-oriented medical schools. The School is consistently among the nation’s top recipients of funding from the National Institutes of Health, with \$546 million awarded in the 2021 fiscal year.

The University of Pennsylvania Health System’s patient care facilities include: the Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania and Penn Presbyterian Medical Center—which are recognized as one of the nation’s top “Honor Roll” hospitals by U.S. News & World Report—Chester County Hospital; Lancaster General Health; Penn Medicine Princeton Health; and Pennsylvania Hospital, the nation’s first hospital, founded in 1751. Additional facilities and enterprises include Good Shepherd Penn Partners, Penn Medicine at Home, Lancaster Behavioral Health Hospital, and Princeton House Behavioral Health, among others.

Penn Medicine is powered by a talented and dedicated workforce of more than 47,000 people. The organization also has alliances with top community health systems across both Southeastern Pennsylvania and Southern New Jersey, creating more options for patients no matter where they live.

Penn Medicine is committed to improving lives and health through a variety of community-based programs and activities. In fiscal year 2021, Penn Medicine provided more than \$619 million to benefit our community.