

Final Reflections

My time at the University of South Carolina was a valuable learning experience and enhanced my understanding of genetic counseling. This internship fostered an appreciation of all the responsibilities of a genetic counselor and how broad their knowledge must be as they interact with various medical professionals. Counselors are versatile in the way that they are able to communicate effectively with physicians, yet also make information understandable to patients at any level of intelligence. At the beginning of the internship, I did not have any previous exposure to prenatal genetic counseling and I especially enjoyed observing in that specialty. The majority of my cases were for prenatal counseling, which at first, I did not think would be an area I saw myself working in long term. Now I am much more open to the possibility. One of the highlights of the internship was observing my first ultrasound and amniocentesis. It was interesting to hear the conversations and reactions of the patients during those times.

Through my daily responsibilities, I gained various skills that will benefit me in my future career. I was able to improve my professional phone skills and also my research skills as I searched through scientific articles for information on the conditions I observed. Performing shadow pedigrees was another activity that helped me start learning the symbols and proper procedure to drawing a pedigree. Overall, I was able to observe over 30 counseling sessions covering a wide variety of conditions. From shadowing different counselors, I was able to observe each person's unique style and approach to how they manage their sessions. I enjoyed seeing the variety between all the counselors and how there is not one perfect method but instead, each session is adaptable to the needs of the patient.

This internship also made me more aware of the psychosocial aspects to genetic counseling as I watched how each counselor handled sensitive topics and showed genuine empathy towards their patients. I was fortunate in that there were multiple unique cases where I was able to hear about some unusual and difficult situations that involved intense psychosocial elements. In this field, it is crucial to create a comfortable environment for the patient and help them reach their own decisions. I also learned how one of a genetic counselor's main responsibilities is to provide all relevant and important information, even when that information may be unpleasant or the patient did not specifically request it. This method of anticipatory guidance promotes patient autonomy and helps the patient feel confident in their decisions. Some of the emotional elements of the counseling sessions were stronger than I expected and I valued gaining that exposure. It was during the more intense cases that I was shown just how important genetic counseling is and the impact it can have. Walking through a difficult situation with a patient requires a high level of trust, empathy, and vulnerability and I felt a great sense of reward in knowing that one day I would be able to provide guidance and aid to patients as a genetic counselor in the future.

This internship exceeded my expectations and I am grateful to have participated in this rare opportunity. The experience and valuable skills I gained provided an in-depth representation of a genetic counselor's career and greatly improved my understanding of genetic counseling. I am confident that this is a field I see myself enjoying and utilizes my passions and talents. I look forward to continuing along this path and learning more about this exciting field and how it is constantly adapting and changing as genetic research advances.