

# GENETIC COUNSELOR LEADS LEGISLATION

**FOR CHRISTINE MILLER**, a 1989 graduate of the School of Medicine's genetic counseling program, excellence has been a part of her daily routine since she was a student.

Her outstanding academic performance earned her the prestigious Physiology Award upon graduation. She was the first and only non-MD graduate to qualify for and receive the award. Since the time Miller left the school, she has capitalized on her energy and drive and helped lead an effort in the state of Utah to have that state become the first in the nation to license genetic counselors.

Immediately upon graduation from USC, she moved to Salt Lake City, because her husband had been accepted to the University of Utah School of Law. "I created my initial genetic counseling position because there were no job openings in the field in Utah. I worked in perinatal genetics for eight years as the sole genetic counselor for an HMO that manages 50 percent of the state's hospitals."

Always interested in the biological sciences, Miller was on a pre-med track during her undergraduate studies. She wanted to work with people and not in a laboratory setting. "In college, I attended a lecture by a visiting genetic counselor. It was very exciting because I knew that was what I wanted to do. It involved being on the cutting edge of knowledge in genetics and working directly with families often helping them find their way through intensely emotional situations," Miller said.

In 1997, Miller accepted a position in perinatal genetics at the University of Utah Medical Center Department of Obstetrics, which required its members to support their positions financially. "That effort became impossible after the UUMC compliance officer reviewed our methods of billing. His interpretation of the existing laws led him to the conclusion that no legal billing mechanism existed for our profession without obtaining a professional license." Because of the department's inability to bill for services, all its genetic counselors except one, Miller, were let go. "I began contacting my legislative representatives, the Department of Professional Licensing, and the Utah Medical Association to educate myself regarding the licensure process and gain their support. I elicited support from all the other genetic counselors and geneticists in the state who helped me complete the long Sunrise Committee Application and scrape together the \$500 for its review," Miller said.

With support from those organizations, Miller addressed Utah's House of Representatives and Senate committees voting on the bill, and she urged patients to lobby their senators and representatives. The Governor of Utah signed the Genetic Counseling Licensing Act into law in April 2001, and all the state's genetic counselors were licensed by 2002. The legislation established the Genetic Counseling Licensing Board that oversees the practice of all genetic counselors in Utah. Miller chairs this governor-appointed board that consists of four genetic counselors and a member of the general public. Of her exceptional service to her state and her profession, Miller is humble, noting, "This cooperative effort demonstrates what can happen if everyone works together for a common cause."

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