



Genetic counseling educators connect globally with USC's help

Genetic counseling educators from around the world are exchanging ideas and information through a first-ever alliance organized by the director of the University of South Carolina's Genetic Counseling Program in the School of Medicine.

Janice Edwards, an associate professor in the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology and former accreditation chair for the American Board of Genetic Counseling, began contacting genetic counseling educators several years ago to assess genetic counseling instruction outside of the United States.

"Genetic counseling is a fairly new specialty—there are 30 training programs in the United States that have developed since the 1970s, and it is evolving rapidly in other countries," Edwards said. "In many countries, there are no genetic counselors to work with patients."

Edwards' efforts led to international student exchanges and, this past spring, resulted in an international conference in Manchester, England, that Edwards organized as part of a fellowship from the National Society of Genetic Counselors. At the conference, genetic counseling educators from Europe, Africa, Asia, Australia, the Middle East, and the United States began the formation of an international genetic counseling society called the Transnational Alliance for Genetic Counseling. Proceedings from the conference will be published next spring in the *Journal of Genetic Counseling*.

The Genetic Counseling Program has created a Web site for the alliance that is expected to foster contacts and exchanges among genetic counseling education programs around the world.

"The majority of work and communication for this group will happen electronically through the USC-hosted Web site," Edwards said. "We'll see each other face to face every other year, next in Europe in 2008."

The School of Medicine's Genetic Counseling Program began in 1985 as the nation's 10th program. The highly competitive master's degree program annually admits six to eight students who study advanced genetics and focus on genetic disease and birth defects. Graduates work as specialized health professionals who counsel individuals and families.