



A HISTORY OF GENETIC COUNSELLING AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN (UCT)

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UCT'S INVOLVEMENT IN GENETIC COUNSELLING COMMITTEES NATIONALLY AND INTERNATIONALLY

- In **2004**, **Jacquie Greenberg** was invited to join leaders in the Genetic Counselling profession from the USA, UK, Australia and Japan, who share an interest in genetic counselling education worldwide.
- **Pat Craig, Ronnie Smart and Jacquie Greenberg** attended the Southern African Society for Human Genetics (SASHG) Symposium at Faculty of Health Sciences, University of the Free State, Bloemfontein (15–16th June **2004**) and gave a workshop on: **The appropriate and ethical use of diagnostic genetic testing**. **Pat Craig** and **Jacquie Greenberg** each did oral presentations related to genetic counselling.
- At this meeting, a working group was established to address the issues of genetic counselling in Southern Africa and **Pat Craig** was elected as the chairperson. She was then the HPCSA genetic counselling representative on the Medical Science Committee (elected for a 5 years term of office).
- At the Manchester meeting in **2006**, which was attended by 72 delegates from 15 countries, the Transnational Alliance for Genetic Counsellors (TAGC) was formed. **Jacquie Greenberg** was elected onto the Standing committee.
- In **2007**, Genetic Counsellors met as a body in South Africa for the first time in Stellenbosch at the 13th congress of the South African Society of Human Genetics (SASHG), under the leadership of **Jennifer Kromberg**.
- The TAGC committee met again in Barcelona in **2008** to develop the TAGC mission and vision. At this meeting **Jacquie Greenberg** was elected to represent South Africa on the steering committee of TAGC.
- At the Joint Congress of the SASHG and Africa Society for Human Genetics in Cape Town **2011**, **Tina-Marié Wessels** was elected as the new Chair and **Mardelle Schoeman** as the Genetic Counsellor's representative on the HPCSA.
- In **2011** UCT was reaccredited for Genetic Counselling internship training by the HPCSA for the next 5 year cycle.
- As of **2012**, South Africa, the United Kingdom and Australia have a reciprocity agreement which was initiated by the TAGC after their last meeting in Montreal in **2011**, attended by **Tina-Marié Wessels** and **Jacquie Greenberg**. This means that genetic counsellors from these 3 countries can work and register in any of the other countries by completing a "shortened internship" involving 6 months working experience, submission of an essay comparing the two health systems, and three references. On the TAGC website is a section detailing credentialing requirements (<http://tagc.med.sc.edu/International.Credentialing%20.asp>).

- In **2012**, **Jacquie Greenberg** stepped down as the South African representative on the Board of the TAGC (she had held this position since **2006**), and was replaced by **Tina-Marié Wessels**.

UCT'S MASTERS (MSc) IN GENETIC COUNSELLING

2004

- UCT began offering a Masters in Genetic Counselling by coursework and dissertation.
- Two students, **Frieda Basson (now Loubser)** and **Brenda Kruger** enrolled for the course in 2004 and were the first genetic counsellors to take the oath at UCT (and in South Africa)
- The first two genetic counsellor interns were registered at UCT (first for South Africa): **Raj Ramesar** and **Elise Peterson**. Our UCT experiential internship training course was officially accepted by the HPCSA in 2004.
- A medical genetics module was run as part of our MSc course which involved the training of the first two registered medical geneticists at UCT: Drs **Rik de Decker** and **Karen Fieggen** qualified as geneticists in the subspecialty medical genetics in 2004.

2005

- The first two UCT registered genetic counselling students graduated in 2005: **Frieda Basson** and **Brenda Kruger**.
- **Frieda Basson/Loubser** was appointed to the first genetic counselling intern post at the NHLS/GSH
- Three more students enrolled in the genetic counselling course: **Kelly Loggenberg**, **Gabrielle Solomon** and **Awelani Mutshembele**.

2006

- **Kelly Loggenberg** graduated with an MSc in Genetic Counselling
- Two further students were registered for the course: **Zandre Bruwer** and **Mardelle Schoeman**

2007

- **Frieda Basson/Loubser** was appointed the first genetic counselling post at GSH/NHLS.
- **Mardelle Schoeman** and **Zandre Bruwer (now Laing)** graduated with an MSc in Genetic Counselling.

2008/2009

- **Gabrielle Solomon** graduated, with distinction, with a converted research Masters.
- In 2008/2009 the course was informally reviewed and in July of 2009 **Chanel Lewis** and **Chantelle Scott** enrolled for the course.
- **Raj Ramesar** was registered as a Genetic Counsellor with the HPCSA in 2009

2010

- Two students enrolled for the course in 2010: **Nakita Verkijk (now Laing)** and **Vanessa Thomas**.

2011

- **Chantelle Scott** graduated with a MSc in Genetic Counselling in June 2011
- **Nakita Verkijk/Laing** graduated, with distinction, with a MSc in genetic counselling.
- **Zandre Bruwer/Laing** graduated with a PhD, the first South African qualified, HPCSA registered Genetic Counsellor to graduate with a PhD on a genetic counselling related topic from UCT and possibly the first in South Africa.
- 2011 saw the loss of the only part-time post for a Genetic Counsellor at UCT (National Health Laboratory Services funded for the past 5 years) as well as the only Genetic Counselling Intern training post at UCT: both due to lack of funding.
- Half of the posts at the University of Witwatersrand (Wits/NHLS) were also cut.

2012/2013

- Training programmes were suspended at both UCT and Wits in 2012 and 2013.
- During this time, major efforts were made to secure substantive posts for Genetic Counsellors throughout the Western Cape.
- In July/August 2012, 3 elective students (on rotation), **Laurence Baret** from The Hospital for Sick Children, University of Toronto and **Stephanie Goettl** and **Emily Sandberg** from the University of Minnesota, USA, visited Cape Town to observe genetic counselling in South Africa. They spent 6 weeks at UCT in our training unit.
- Ten occasional students registered in June–December 2013 for the first semester course entitled: Principles of Genetic Counselling; Coursework.

2014

- The UCT training programme was reopened in 2014 and three students were enrolled for the MSc in Genetic Counselling; **Gill Dusterwald**, **Tarryn Shaw** and **Katryn Forie**. They are currently in the process of completing their first year of the course.
- UCT appointed the first HPCSA registered Genetic Counsellor with a PhD degree in Genetic Counselling as a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Clinical Laboratory Sciences; Division of Human Genetics: **Dr Tina–Marié Wessels**.
- PAWC appointed the first HPCSA Genetic Counsellor at GSH: **Nakita Laing**.
- A total of 14 health care professionals registered for the four semester courses in 2014.

To date: 14 registered for the course since 2004: 7 qualified and are practising Genetic Counsellors, including one individual who originally registered for the programme, converted to a full research MSc (thesis only), 1 moved to UK, 1 to Australia and 1 to Oman, while 4 remained in South Africa. Three are still in training.