



Genetic Counseling

Spring 2019

IN THIS ISSUE

- From the Desk of Leadership
- Making an Impact: Westman Scholarship Fund
- Where Are They Now? Class of 2018
- Alumni Spotlight
- Current Student Awards
- Admissions Wine Celebration
- Student Blog
- Goodbye, Congratulations and Welcome!
- Faculty Spotlight

FROM THE DESK OF PROGRAM LEADERSHIP

As we approach the graduation of our fourth cohort of students, I am humbled by the successes of our students, alumni, faculty and the program itself. In this issue, you will learn that, as in past years, several of our students received national or local awards to carry out their thesis work. In addition, all alumni who submitted their thesis work to professional conferences had it accepted for platform or poster presentations. In fact, current students Alayne Meyer and Kelly Rich had their thesis work accepted for platform presentations at the American Academy of Neurology's Annual Meeting before they even graduated! Alumni and faculty currently serve on the boards and committees of the NSGC, ASHG, ABGC, ACGC, ACMG and multiple other organizations, and our ABGC first-time board pass rate is an outstanding 96 percent. Our students, alumni and faculty continue to engage in community efforts as well, volunteering for advocacy organizations, leading support groups and helping make the lives of those with genetic conditions more manageable through their day-to-day clinical and laboratory responsibilities. I believe these successes illustrate that The Ohio State University Genetic Counseling Graduate Program is accomplishing its mission to train knowledgeable, compassionate and scholarly genetic counselors. I hope you do, too.

In this inaugural issue of our program newsletter, you will also learn about the amazing gift of a scholarship fund that Dr. Westman and her husband have given us. You will see where the graduates of the Class of 2018 are practicing, and you will receive an update on what one graduate has been doing since leaving the OSU-GCGP.

I wanted to take this opportunity to update you on four programmatic initiatives the OSU-GCGP is embarking on this year:

1. Implement research and recruitment efforts related to increasing diversity in the profession.
2. Develop a branding, marketing and communication plan.
3. Perform an overall curricular assessment and evaluation.
4. Design and implement a framework for competency-based assessment specific to fieldwork training.

FROM THE DESK OF PROGRAM LEADERSHIP *continued on following page*



THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY
WEXNER MEDICAL CENTER

To accomplish these goals, we will work with our Advisory Board, faculty from The Ohio State University Center for Advancement of Teaching, The Ohio State University College of Medicine marketing and communications staff as well as clinical educators from around the globe. In addition, we will reach out to many of you for feedback and assistance. If you know you are interested in helping with one of these initiatives, please reach out! It is my hope that by this time next year, I will be able to report the OSU-GCGP has learned some lessons, overcome some challenges, achieved successes and become an even stronger program.

In closing, I hope to see you all in Salt Lake City at the Alumni Reunion during the NSGC Annual Conference. If you cannot make it to NSGC, you can find me in Houston at the ASHG 2019 Annual Meeting or at the World Congress on Genetic Counseling in Manchester, England (I hope Leigha will come to Manchester, too!). If those locations do not work, visit us in Columbus!

Find our most up-to-date happenings on [Twitter @OhioStateGCProg](#)



Dawn Allain, MS, LGC
Director, Genetic Counseling
Graduate Program



MAKING AN IMPACT: SCHOLARSHIP FUND AIMS TO SUPPORT GENETIC COUNSELING STUDENTS

Brooke Nightingale, MS '18, and **Paul Hudson, MS '18**, say the small class size of Ohio State's selective Genetic Counseling Graduate Program meant meaningful and impactful time spent with their professors – in particular with **Judith Westman, MD '81**, Ohio State College of Medicine professor emeritus and clinical geneticist in the Division of Human Genetics, Department of Internal Medicine.

Today, Nightingale is a pediatric genetic counselor with Lucile Packard Children's Hospital Stanford in Palo Alto, California; Hudson is a prenatal genetic counselor with Miami Valley Hospital Maternal-Fetal Medicine, Ultrasound and Genetics in Dayton, Ohio. Both attribute the start of their professional journey to the program's hands-on clinic experience they received from their professors and Dr. Westman's guidance.

"We can see how much she values genetic counselors – it's clear from working with her in clinic," Nightingale says. "If I was nervous, she would take time to explain her knowledge on clinical skills or patient interaction. She gave us the freedom to work with patients and gave her support."

The Need for Scholarships

For Dr. Westman, Nightingale's and Hudson's successes are the reason she and her husband, David, established the Westman Scholarship Fund for Ohio State students in the Genetic Counseling Graduate Program. A Buckeye at heart and a longtime donor to Ohio State, Dr. Westman has always felt driven to give back to the students following in her footsteps – and helping students meet the high cost of tuition with scholarships is a big part of that effort.

Dr. Westman says that, as a teacher, it is wonderful to be able to help support a program where students like Nightingale and Hudson are interested in learning and doing their best.

"I am impressed by their caliber and quality," she says.

Moreover, she says she hopes the fund, set up to be endowed, can attract students to the program who otherwise may decide to decline due to burdensome debts. There have been three graduating classes since the two-year graduate program was established in 2014.

In general, the burgeoning career path of genetic counseling lacks scholarship support for graduate programs nationwide. According to the Accreditation Council for Genetic Counseling, only 49 genetic counseling graduate programs are offered in the United States, and not many offer

scholarships toward their specific programs. Cost is a top deciding factor, or in some cases a deterring factor, for prospective genetic counseling students, Dr. Westman says.

At Ohio State, in-state tuition and fees cost \$20,001 per year to obtain a Master of Science in Genetic Counseling – and that does not include living expenses, such as room and board, books and supplies. Out-of-state tuition and fees cost \$42,049 per year.

Nightingale, who is from Belmont, California, remembers the daunting expenses when she first surveyed potential programs. “I had to think twice about Ohio State because it’s one of the more expensive out-of-state programs to go to,” she says.

Hudson says the Westman scholarship will be metamorphic for today’s students.

“Graduate school is definitely an investment in time and money,” he says. “A scholarship could be life-changing. With extra support, there wouldn’t be as much pressure as you approach graduation and are looking for a job.”

Inspiration to Pay It Forward

Dr. Westman, whose daughter Rachel is also a genetic counselor in Idaho, says there is a need to educate more students nationwide about the opportunities in the field. She sees the impact her students and daughter have made around the country.

For Nightingale, news about the gift was heartwarming. “When I heard that Dr. Westman contributed a scholarship, I got really emotional,” she says. “That is so wonderful. The scholarship will help attract a lot of great students to the program.”

Dr. Westman notes that graduate school is a hefty investment, so debt may influence where someone chooses to practice. She wants to allow graduates to go to their location of choice.

“If money is keeping you from passion or a career that is needed or helpful, that is a shame,” Dr. Westman says. “We hope to encourage others to contribute to the fund so we have more money to award, or that other people will start similar funds.”



Judy and Dave Westman



Paul Hudson



Brooke Nightingale

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Gifts to the Dr. Judith and David Westman Scholarship Fund can be made online by going to giveto.osu.edu and entering fund number 483371. Checks can also be made out to the OSU Foundation with the fund number referenced in the memo section, and mailed to 1480 W. Lane Ave., Columbus OH 43221.



ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT:

DONIKA SAPORITO

Each newsletter, we will interview one of the program's alumni to spotlight their achievements and talk about where they are now. In this edition, first-year student Cara Barnett interviewed Class of 2016's Donika Saporito.



Donika Saporito, MS, CGC



Cara Barnett, B

What is your current position, and what is an average day like for you as a genetic counselor?

"I am a counselor at MD Anderson main campus in Houston. It is awesome, and I love my job. My co-workers are amazing, so that is a huge perk of my job as well! I primarily see patients in the breast and GI centers, because we have many cancer-specific clinics. Outside of breast and GI, we have several clinics, including melanoma, pediatric, brain and spine, leukemia and sarcoma clinic. My days vary throughout the week, but I have lots of days that are primarily spent in clinic counseling patients. I am also involved in supervising students, coordinating the cancer course for the UT Houston program and doing research. One day in clinic could include supervising a student and having clinic all day, then going to cancer class for the first-year students late in the afternoon; another day could include calling out results to patients, working on research and attending case conference in the afternoon. What I really enjoy about my job is every day is a little different, so it doesn't get so monotonous. This was a huge draw for coming to a cancer center that is also involved in a graduate program."

What is your favorite part of your current position?

"My favorite part is having the opportunity to see patients every day and be in their lives! I think this is the reason so many of us are drawn to genetic counseling in the first place. I am really thankful that spending time with patients is the center of my role. Even though I'm able to dip my toes into a lot of different stuff, seeing patients is still at the heart of what I'm doing. Patients are really incredible; sometimes they are in the midst of something so difficult and their outlook on life is so precious. So you go into the patient room expecting to counsel and educate, but then you leave being so inspired by them. It is so refreshing every day to be reminded that we are in this field not necessarily to find a novel mutation or publish a paper, but to build relationships with our patients."

ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT continued on following page

Where Are They Now? The Class of 2018 Is All Over!



Madison Bernhardt

- St. Luke's Health System, Mountain States Tumor Institute
- Boise, Idaho
- Cancer



Sabrina DiMaso

- DuPage Medical Group
- Lisle, Illinois
- Cancer



Paul Hudson

- Miami Valley Hospital
- Dayton, Ohio
- Prenatal



Holly Klepek

- Indiana University Medical Center
- Indianapolis, Indiana
- Neuroscience



Brooke Nightingale

- Stanford University, Div. of Human Genetics
- Stanford, California
- Pediatrics



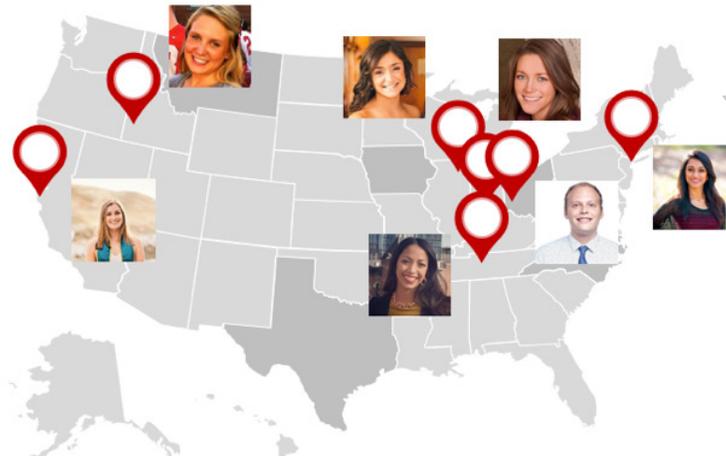
Megha Ranganathan

- Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center
- New York, New York
- Cancer



Brenda Zuniga

- Vanderbilt University Medical Center, Hereditary Cancer Clinic
- Nashville, Tennessee
- Cancer



STUDENT BLOG: PERSON FIRST, GENETIC COUNSELOR SECOND

The most important lesson I learned while training to be a genetic counselor: person first, genetic counselor second



Marie-Louise Henry, B

Throughout my time in graduate school, I've thought often about how being a genetic counselor fits into my personal identity. I've developed skill sets in empathy and communication as well as knowledge of current research. I've learned to aid in facilitation of patient decision-making. Ask a genetic counselor why they chose this career, and many will answer, "I wanted to bridge my passion for science and helping others." A crossover between the worlds of genetics and psychosocial counseling, genetic counselors wear many different hats: educator, advocate, ally and expert. We therefore subscribe to many different professional standards and expectations. Through these past two years, I've thought about how other pieces of my personal identity fit into my role as a genetic counselor.

STUDENT BLOG: PERSON FIRST, GENETIC COUNSELOR SECOND *continued on following page*

What skills did you learn from the Ohio State program that you find particularly important?

"I am obviously super biased and have no doubt that Ohio State is the best program ever. It is an incredible program, and what they are incredibly good at is sharpening each student's unique set of skills. They do a really good job tailoring our education to make sure we are being the best genetic counselors (rock stars!), and we end up developing relationships with people who care about us, whether that is our supervisor or our course director. That is such a great feeling as a student! They are not just teaching us how to be a genetic counselor, but they take what's special about us and find how to make that work best so we can be the best counselors and provide the best services to people. I think through that we end up finding our voices as genetic counselors, which in turn makes us more successful."

What advice would you give to the first-year students in the program?

"It's true when they say you are going to be a lifelong learner. In graduate school, you are surrounded by genetic counselors who are devoted to your education. You are surrounded by such wonderful resources and clinics throughout the program – just soak that all in and take every advantage you have to learn from people. If someone has time to talk with you and answer your questions, take advantage of that rather than just rushing home to get a break. Look for these opportunities and take advantage of them – you won't regret that time. It's a lot harder to seek out these opportunities when you're working. As a student, even though it seems like it's hard, it's the best time to build that foundation."

What advice would you give to the second-year students in the program?

"When you're a second year, you are running on fumes, but you are so close! You've grown so much! Continue to build those relationships, whether that is with your classmates or other genetic counselors at NSGC – those are people you are going to interact with and seek advice from. Be genuine and invest in relationships. Our community is so small, so you're going to be running into people constantly and maybe asking for favors or working together closely. Start giving back to the field. You see many seasoned genetic counselors do so much for us, and it's natural to want to be in their position. You don't need to have 15 years of experience to do that – you can start doing that right away."



FACULTY SPOTLIGHT: ALYSSA WRIGHT

Alyssa Wright is the lead genetic counselor with OhioHealth Maternal Fetal Medicine. She started her genetic counseling career at Beaumont Hospital – Dearborn primarily seeing prenatal patients, but also helping with cancer patients and in the cytogenetics laboratory. Her

FACULTY SPOTLIGHT: ALYSSA WRIGHT *continued on following page*

STUDENT BLOG: PERSON FIRST, GENETIC COUNSELOR SECOND *continued from previous page*

A large piece of my identity throughout my undergraduate studies was “student.” I was part teaching assistant, part volunteer coordinator and a regular late-night library visitor. My classmates came from a diverse collection of backgrounds – a biological engineer, a bilingual clinic receptionist, a post-baccalaureate researcher and an IT technology specialist. We have students who’ve known they wanted to be a genetic counselor since high school, and others who left jobs and careers behind. We each have a story of what first drew us to genetic counseling and motivators for what kept us going.

Early in the graduate program, we were introduced to the idea of presenting a “blank slate” to clients. The concept is that by limiting the amount of personal information shared, the focus of the counseling session remains on the client rather than the counselor. There are varying opinions about personal disclosure within the genetic counseling community; while some counselors have photos of their family hanging in their office, others will keep more conservative boundaries between their personal and professional worlds. We were asked to think critically about the value of this practice, potential limitations or harms, and whether it was even feasible.

I’ve gained a great appreciation for the gentle power of personal disclosure. I am, after all, a person first, genetic counselor second. So what does this mean, and why is important to me? In my practice, I may be meeting with patients in some of the most grueling days of their lives. They may have been handed a new diagnosis or explanation of their family history, and others will still be desperately searching for answers. I value human connection and transparency. As their healthcare provider, I want to be approachable. I certainly don’t want to give the impression that I have all the answers about which decisions are right for them. Showing up authentically in my professional work begins an honest conversation.

My reasons for becoming a genetic counselor are deeply rooted in my own life experiences and narrative. My motivations and passion have been shaped from my relationships, lessons learned and personal journey. Professionally, I have a choice. I can sit with patients – authority-to-human, or human-to-human. It is ultimately my decision which relationship to choose. That being said, there is a significant difference between coming to sessions as myself versus making them about myself. Being self-aware of the second and adjusting for it is an important tenet of my work. However, bringing my genuine self into counseling sessions is how connections are made. This is how rapport is built and trust is established.

Before I choose to disclose something in a professional setting, I know it’s important to pause and ask myself, “Why am I sharing this?” The answer should always be: to increase connection. To remind others they aren’t alone. To break down the power dynamic of the expert to patient, and instead, empower patients. As I begin my career, I hope to stay reflective on this issue and allow it to mold my future practice.

FACULTY SPOTLIGHT: ALYSSA WRIGHT *continued from previous page*

clinical supervising experience started while in Michigan in late 2007, and upon coming to Columbus, she continued her supervisory work for The Ohio State University’s Genetic Counseling Graduate Program starting in January 2017.

With more than 10 years of experience mentoring students in their rotations, Alyssa enjoys seeing the growth her trainees can experience in just a few weeks in clinic. Some of the most outstanding growth occurs when a student learns to overcome their own nervousness and personal views around difficult situations such as life-limiting disorders and pregnancy termination, and gains the ability to facilitate patient discussion and decision-making. Students are able to counsel in ways they never thought they could, and they do so successfully thanks to her guidance.

When asked if she has seen any growth in herself as a genetic counselor as a result of her supervision experience, Alyssa remembers that when she was a recent graduate and new to supervising, she had almost hoped students would approach counseling in a similar way to her because it would be easier to give feedback to them that way. But for her now, one of the most interesting parts of supervising is dealing with the personalities and backgrounds students bring to the table with counseling, and guiding them through the effects that may have on their ability to counsel. Additionally, supervising has pushed her to think about how she counsels patients, whether what she is saying will work well, or if there is room for improvement. She actively shares what has worked best for her with trainees for use in their own practice.

Alyssa is excited to continue her work in Columbus, both as a genetic counselor at OhioHealth and as a supervisor of the graduate program’s future genetic counselors. The program is grateful for her hard work and dedication to its students, and we look forward to collaborating with her for years to come!



2018-2019 ACADEMIC YEAR CONGRATULATIONS...

Congratulations to Katie Ziegler on her recent engagement and new adventure in Colorado. She will be missed.

Thank you to Allison Daley for her work as our Public Health course director! While Allison will no longer be a course director, we are happy she continues to be involved as a thesis advisor and clinical supervisor.

Erin O'Toole left OhioHealth and took a job with Invitae. While we miss having her as a clinical supervisor, we are thrilled that she remains on our Admissions Committee.

Ohio State welcomes Lindsey Byrne to our cancer genetic group.

We welcomed **new clinical supervisors: Megan Knapke (Mt. Carmel-Prenatal); Alexandra Hensel (OSU-Prenatal); Jenni Carroll, Amy Siemon and Jordan Snajczuk (NCH-Pediatrics); and Paul Hudson (Miami Valley-Prenatal).**

We said **goodbye to Sara Fitzgerald-Butt and Nick Case.** While we are thrilled they both landed outstanding cardiogenetic jobs at Indiana University, we miss them.

Congratulations to faculty member Elizabeth Jordan on the birth of her son, Jude.

Send us your updates so we can share them in our next newsletter.

2019

ADMISSIONS FINAL RANKING WINE CELEBRATION

Our Admissions Committee members and students celebrated another successful interview season following this year's final ranking meeting in mid-April. Our first Admissions Final Ranking Celebration took us to Upper Arlington's Wine Bistro, where we all raised a glass to the continued success of the program.

Leadership would like to thank the committee and students for all of their efforts in reviewing, interviewing, hosting and facilitating the process for the OSU-GCGP students of tomorrow.

2018 STUDENT RESEARCH AWARDS

	Amber Aeilts	2018 JEMF Student Research Award "Reactions to Receiving Family Health Information Via Infographic Video"
	Julia Coltri	2018 NSGC Familial Cancer Special Interest Group Award "Transgender Male Patients and Hereditary Breast Cancer Risk: Broaching Difficult Topics to Reduce Healthcare Disparities"
	Julia Cooper	2018 NSGC Familial Cancer Special Interest Group Award "Outcomes and Attitudes Regarding Genetics Recontact of Patients with Unexplained Defective Mismatch Repair"
	Kate Myers	2018 NSGC Cardiovascular Special Interest Group Award "Acceptability and Familiarity of Genetic Treatment Technologies: A Survey of Individuals with Sudden Arrhythmia Death Syndrome (SADS) Conditions"
	Abbie Schaber	2018 Alumni Grants for Graduate Research and Scholarship Award "Genetic Counseling and Testing in a Pediatric Population with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)"

