

Genetics Services for the Un/Underinsured in the Greater Ft. Worth Area

Genetics in Your Practice

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As oncology clinicians, we are always trying to find resources for our patients to maximize the quality of care. Unfortunately, we have many un/underinsured patients in Tarrant County, and many residents of more rural communities are in the same position. Many of these individuals cannot secure the services they need due to high out-of-pocket cost and lack of insurance (or sky-high deductibles). In rural communities, distance and transportation can be a major barrier to obtaining necessary services as well. In genetics, we are dealing with these same conundrums; high risk patients go untested and unscreened all too often.

With this in mind, Dr. David Euhus (breast surgeon and clinical director of the UT Southwestern genetics program) wrote a grant to the Cancer Prevention Research Institute of Texas (CPRIT) to address these disparities. Our genetics division was recently awarded \$1.5 million over the next 3 years to bring genetics services to the underserved Dallas, Tarrant, Hood, Parker, Wise and Johnson county residents. This will include Parkland Memorial Hospital, John Peter Smith Hospital (JPS), and un- or underinsured patients in the aforementioned counties that meet financial criteria (300% poverty level). Qualification for ‘underinsured’ status will be quantified in our guidelines. This grant will address several issues:

1. *Recognizing high-risk patients for breast and colon genetic testing in underserved populations.* We will accomplish this by utilizing our mobile mammography units and current software-based family history questions to find high-risk patients on these units. In addition, we will screen colorectal and uterine tumors in underserved patients diagnosed under age 70 and 55, respectively, via immunohistochemical (IHC) analysis of the mismatch repair proteins for suspicion of Lynch syndrome. Patients that screen positive from mobile mammography or tumor-based testing will be seen by a genetic counselor for further consultation and consideration of testing.
2. *Genetic testing for qualifying underserved patients.* Patients that meet testing criteria due to abnormal IHC testing or qualification via screening by the mobile units will be offered funded testing for hereditary colon or breast cancer syndromes, respectively.
3. *Surveillance for high-risk patients.* For those with positive genetic testing results or from high-risk families, breast or colon surveillance will be funded for the duration of the grant. Breast surveillance will include mammography and breast MRI alternating every 6 months, and annual colonoscopy will be funded for patients with Lynch syndrome. Also, un/underinsured patients in these counties with previously discovered hereditary breast or colon cancer syndromes will also qualify for necessary surveillance as outlined above.
4. *Telegenetics clinics for rural counties.* As discussed above, distance and transportation is a significant barrier to services for patients outside of Tarrant County. To address this issue, we will pilot a telegenetic counseling program: monitors will be set up in a clinic at a hospital in Hood, Wise, Johnson and Parker counties, and a genetic counselor at Moncrief Cancer Institute will be able to counsel these patients via internet (similar to Skype or iChat). This way, distance

is significantly decreased and transportation costs minimized to obtain genetics services. We will fund genetic testing and/or necessary surveillance for qualifying patients that are seen in telegenetics clinics as discussed previously.

We also have funds allocated to refine CancerGeneConnect; this is our online genetics questionnaire and family history program that we ask our patients to fill out prior to their genetics consultation that enables us to run risk numbers for patients at the appointment. We will also be able to translate this into Spanish so that our Spanish-speaking patients have accessibility to the program.

We are thrilled to make genetics services accessible to qualifying patients in the underserved population. If you have a patient that may qualify, please contact your friendly genetic counselor at 817-838-4871 to discuss this opportunity.