

About Your Referral to Medical Genetics

*Dawna Gilchrist, MD, FRCPC FCCMG
and Deepti Babu, MS, CGC*

The Medical Genetics Clinic sees ONLY those patients and families who appear to be at a high risk for a hereditary cancer syndrome. Even though there may be cancer in your family, it doesn't necessarily mean that there is a significant hereditary cause. .

About 90-95% of all cancers are due to multiple causes, including environmental exposures and personal factors like age, gender and lifestyle choices.

Only 5-10% of any type of cancer is hereditary in nature. Hereditary cancer is due to a mutation (a change) in a single gene. Such cancers are almost entirely caused by their genetic mutation and do not have significant contributors from environmental or personal factors. Hereditary cancer tends to be of a single type, or a few specific types that may occur together in a pattern, such as hereditary breast-ovarian cancer (HBOC) syndrome.

What to Expect Before an Appointment in Medical Genetics:

We have established criteria for accepting referrals for genetic evaluation and counseling. Once the referral is accepted, you will be asked to gather information about your personal and family histories. We generally look for the following:

1. Multiple cases of the same, or related, cancers, in two generations of your family.
2. Early age at diagnosis, typically under age 50 years. An early case is much more important in the setting of multiple cases of the same or related cancers.
3. Relationships between the people who have cancer on both maternal and paternal sides of the family. The risk is most significant if the affected individuals are you and/or very close relatives e.g. parents, children, siblings (first degree relatives). But, it is also important to know about aunts, uncles, grandparents (second degree relatives) and even cousins (third degree relatives).

With your help, we obtain medical records to confirm a cancer diagnosis for

relevant people in your family. Once this is completed, we offer you an appointment for genetic counselling. At this appointment you can expect to receive information pertaining to cancer risks for you and your family members. We will make medical recommendations based on your family history and may offer genetic testing to an appropriate family member. We will also go over the pros and cons of genetic testing in detail. At no point should you or your family member(s) feel obligated to proceed with genetic testing if you do not wish to do so just because you attended an appointment.

How you can move things along:

1. Find out whether a relative has been seen in our medical genetics clinic or ANY medical genetics clinic previously. If yes, please let us know as soon as possible. If your relative was seen by us or elsewhere, a lot of time may be saved as the necessary information may already have been collected.

Medical Genetics continued

2. Find out the following about your first, second and third degree relatives:
 - a. First and last name, current age
 - b. Whether they have had cancer and the exact type of cancer – especially if it was an abdominal cancer or a “female” cancer (cervical, uterine or ovarian).
 - c. Age at which cancer was first diagnosed
 - d. If deceased, age at death
3. Find out who is willing to participate in our investigations:
 - a. We often need medical records to confirm cancers. Find out who is willing to help by signing consent

forms for their records.

- b. Has someone survived breast and/or ovarian cancer in the family? If so, they may be the best person in the family to offer genetic testing. Most of our tests MUST start with a fresh blood sample from an affected individual who has had genetic counseling..
- c. If you bring a relative(s) to your appointment, such as someone who may be suitable for genetic testing, please let us know BEFORE you come to your appointment. We need to register, beforehand, all individuals seen by us.
4. Come to your appointment with your Alberta Health Care Number and the names of all physicians that you see routinely.

If you have any questions about collecting information, call the Medical Genetics Clinic, and we will try to help you as best as we can. However, with respect to your family members, remember that not all will want to talk about their cancer, share records, or be seen in Medical Genetics Clinic. Be aware that we cannot directly contact your relatives for you, and we have no source of information about your family except what you provide, or facilitate access to (via consent for records), for us.

Lastly, if you do not wish to have a medical genetics appointment, or need to cancel your appointment, please let us know as soon as possible so we can make the time available for someone else.