The Future of Cancer Genetics.

Each year, new genes are discovered and testing improves. This leads to recognition of new hereditary cancer syndromes and a better understanding of existing syndromes. Before 2012/2013, most patients had testing of only 1 to 5 genes. Since that time, the standard practice is for many genes to be assessed at once using gene panels. These panels can evaluate as few as two genes to more than 100 genes. Since these significant advances have been made in a short period of time, patients who were previously tested may want to return for further assessment.

Genetic counseling is a very important part of genetic testing, as there are benefits and limitations to any genetic test and important factors to consider. The genetic counselor will work with you to discuss all aspects of genetic testing in detail. Additionally, the recommendations for management of patients with an identified mutation are constantly evolving. Genetic counselors work continually to keep patients and physicians informed, as these changes can greatly impact patient care.

Contact Our Certified Genetic Counselors

Stacy M. Utay, M.S., CGC
Certified Genetic Counselor
Phone: 972-566-8247
Stacy.Utay@MedicalCityHealth.com

Sheryl Walker, M.S., CGC
Certified Genetic Counselor
Phone: 972-566-4119
Sheryl.Walker@MedicalCityHealth.com

Clinical Cancer Genetics at Medical City Dallas
7777 Forest Lane, Building A-204, Dallas, TX 75230
Clinic Main Line: 972-566-3955 | Fax: 469-484-2261
Does cancer run in your family?
Much like eye color and skin color, increased cancer risk can be passed down in families. Using genetic risk assessment and testing, Medical City Dallas’ Cancer Genetics Program can identify families with inherited risk and use that information for prevention and early detection. Genetic counselors provide personalized risk assessment and testing for families at increased cancer risk.
Genetic counseling provides education about cancer, including:
- Risk factors
- Hereditary causes
- Recommended screening
- Treatment strategies that can reduce cancer risk
Counselors collaborate with patients in assessing their family history, determining what testing is most appropriate, deciding what genetic laboratory to utilize, discussing potential hereditary cancer syndromes, and reviewing risk management recommendations. This process can help patients who have been diagnosed with cancer, as well as those who have never been diagnosed but are concerned about their risk.

What is genetic testing and what can it tell you?
Cancer genetic testing looks for inherited gene mutations that increase cancer risk. Test results can help explain why some families develop cancer more frequently than others, identify which individuals in a given family are more likely to be diagnosed with cancer, and recommend strategies for cancer risk reduction. Strategy options include more frequent/earlier screening, taking medications to reduce the likelihood of cancer development, and in some cases, removing at-risk tissue before cancer occurs.

What features suggest hereditary cancer risk and when is genetic testing recommended?
- Personal/family history of early onset cancer (usually before age 50)
- Multiple cancers in the same individual
- Strong family history of cancer (multiple family members/multiple generations)
- Personal/family history of rare cancers, such as male breast cancer or ovarian cancer
- Persons of Ashkenazi (central or eastern European) Jewish ancestry, especially those with a family history of cancer

What kind of testing is available and what is involved?
The Cancer Genetics Program at Medical City Dallas facilitates testing for all types of cancer, including adult-onset syndromes such as Hereditary Breast/Ovarian Cancer syndrome and Lynch syndrome, as well as those that can have childhood-onset such as retinoblastoma and von Hippel-Lindau. Patients meet with the genetic counselor for approximately one hour and testing is performed through either a blood or saliva sample.

How are results of genetic testing used?
Genetic test results are private health information and are shared only with you and your referring physician. You are encouraged to share your results with your other healthcare providers to ensure appropriate medical management, and with family members so they can be proactive with their health.

Will my insurance cover the cost of genetic testing?
Insurance companies often cover most, or all, of the cost of genetic testing for patients who meet their insurance provider’s criteria for testing. Eligibility for coverage depends on a combination of medical and family history. Having an early diagnosis of cancer (before age 50), and/or a strong family history of cancer increases the likelihood of insurance coverage.
If a patient does not meet insurance criteria, they may still choose to proceed with genetic testing, which must be approved by their referring physician. The cost of genetic testing has been steadily decreasing and many labs offer low-cost options for patients who wish to pay out-of-pocket.

How can I obtain more information?
If you have questions regarding genetic counseling, cancer risk assessment, or insurance coverage of genetic testing, please call our office at (972) 566-3955 or (972) 566-4119.