

Tar Heel Footprints in Health Care

A periodic feature that recognizes individuals whose efforts—often unsung—enhance the health of North Carolinians

Kerry Crandall, MS, CGC



A seasoned genetic counselor at Mission Hospital's Fullerton Genetics Center in Asheville, North Carolina, Kerry Crandall has served in her current position for the past 19 years. In her daily activities, she provides pediatric genetic counseling, prenatal diagnosis counseling, hereditary cancer risk assessment, and general genetic counseling to patients and their families. In addition to her clinical commitments, Crandall also finds time to deliver educational presentations to a range of community members in Western North Carolina, including physicians, allied health professionals, local high school and college faculty and staff members, and the public. Ellen Boyd, MD, a clinical geneticist at Fullerton Genetics Center, said of Crandall, "[her] patients know that they are receiving the best of care and support when they have her. [She] is a great communicator. She empowers her patients and [their] families by providing them with information they need in an insightful manner, with compassion, and always with close follow-up."

In the early 1990s, Crandall began working with Boyd to establish the first genetic counseling program in cancer genetics in Western North Carolina. The company Myriad Genetics had just begun to offer testing of the *BRCA1* and *BRCA2* genes, which confer risk of breast and ovarian cancer, and Crandall took the initiative to apply for and receive a grant to provide *BRCA1* and *BRCA2* genetic testing for patients in the region. Boyd and Crandall also became active in providing enzyme replacement therapy for patients with lysosomal storage disorders by participating in

clinical trials. As a study coordinator, Crandall has overseen numerous clinical trials and has worked alongside institutional review boards to better serve patients. Clinical trials of this nature are often conducted only at large academic research centers; by helping to bring these clinical trials to a community-based hospital, Crandall has allowed affected patients to receive services closer to home.

North Carolina is fortunate to have relatively good coverage of genetic services compared with other states. When Crandall began her career, the primary opportunities for genetic counseling were in either pediatric or prenatal settings. Now, however, many other opportunities exist, including cancer, research, and commercial genetic laboratories. As genetic testing becomes more widely used by primary care as well as specialty services, the need for skilled individuals who can communicate the results of genetic tests will continue to expand rapidly. Due to the constant growth in research findings and rapid advances in technology, genetic counseling is an ideal career for individuals who constantly want to learn. Crandall contends that genetic counselors have the unique opportunity to make a clear difference in the lives of patients through strong communication skills. Shearon Roberts, a fellow genetic counselor at Fullerton, agrees, saying of Crandall, "communication is the essence of our profession, and Kerry is a master." NCMJ

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