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NEWS

ROD R. BLAGOJEVICH - GOVERNOR

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Governor signs law providing new assurance to patients about quality of genetic counseling services

New law requires genetic counselors be licensed by state

Genetic Counselor Licensing Act to ensure trained and qualified practitioners are serving Illinois patients

SPRINGFIELD – Governor Rod R. Blagojevich today signed House Bill 4200, which requires that genetic counselors be licensed by the state. Genetic counselors are members of a health care team that provide important information and support to those with genetic disorders or birth defects and to families who may be at risk for a variety of conditions. Sponsored by Rep. Donald Moffitt (R-Galesburg) and Sen. Richard Winkel (R-Urbana), the new law authorizes the Illinois Department of Financial and Professional Regulation (IDFPR) to assess the fitness and qualifications of genetic counselors. The law provides new assurance to consumers that their genetic counselors have received the adequate training to provide intensely personal services.

“With scientific advancements in the field of genetics occurring all the time, it is critical that we maintain a professional standard and a high level of accountability in the field of genetic counseling,” Gov. Blagojevich said. “This law helps to ensure that the advice Illinois patients receive about their genetics is from a qualified source.”

According to the National Conference of State Legislatures, Illinois becomes only the third state in the nation to require that genetic counselors be licensed. Utah and California also hold genetic counselors to this standard.

“Thanks to Governor Blagojevich's signing of HB 4200, Illinois will continue to be a national leader in helping citizens to use the latest genetic information and technology to live longer and healthier lives with a focus on the genetic building blocks of our bodies. I commend the Governor for signing this law and for understanding the critical role that genetic information will play in our lives in the years ahead,” said Rep. Moffitt.

Genetic counselors provide a variety of services, including estimating the likelihood that a child will be born with a birth defect or other inheritable condition and recommending appropriate genetic testing. Genetic counselors also address the psychological and physical issues that an individual or family might face as a result of diagnosis. The National Society of Genetic Counselors estimates there are between 60 and 75 genetic counselors practicing in Illinois. The new law requires that patients be referred by a physician, advanced practice nurse or physician's assistant to see a genetic counselor and the result of the consultation from the counselor must be reported back to the referring individual.

The completion of the Human Genome Project increased interest in the possibilities available through genetic counseling. The biological map that the Human Genome Project created helps make it possible to identify defective sequences of DNA that could lead to disorders. With this information, as well as an analysis of an individual or family's medical history, genetic counselors advise and educate patients about their risk of passing on certain traits or having inherited certain traits. For example, genetic counseling can be used to identify people who are at risk for Tay-Sachs disease, sickle-cell anemia, Huntington's disease, or hemophilia.

Genetic counselors must be licensed by IDFPR beginning January 1, 2006. In order to obtain a license, applicants must have either a master's degree in genetic counseling or a PhD in medical genetics, and then successfully complete the certification examinations by the American Board of Genetic Counseling or the American Board of Medical Genetics.