



Immediate Release

Contact:

Bill Schmitt

302-327-3318

wschmitt@christianacare.org

Christiana Care Health System Partners with Thomas Jefferson University in New Genetic Counseling Master's Degree Program

Wilmington, DE, March 21, 2017 – With the rapid growth in genetic research and its expanding role in disease diagnosis and future treatments, the [Helen F. Graham Cancer Center & Research Institute](#) at [Christiana Care Health System](#) is partnering with Thomas Jefferson University in a master's degree program to prepare people to become genetic counselors.

The new master's degree program, Human Genetics & Genetic Counseling, earned accreditation in January 2017 from the Accreditation Council for Genetic Counseling. It is offered through Thomas Jefferson University's Jefferson College of Biomedical Sciences in Philadelphia. Master's students will do their academic work primarily at Jefferson and then rotate into Christiana Care Health System's Christiana Hospital and Wilmington Hospital in Delaware and various outpatient settings to have hands-on experience with patients.

Today, there are only 37 genetic counseling degree programs in the United States and four in Canada. Applications for the new program are being accepted for September 2017.

Genetic counselors specialize in assisting families to understand the risk of genetic disorders. These clinical professionals are skilled at eliciting a detailed family history that includes personal, family and medical histories. They work in collaboration with clinical geneticists and other physicians, providers and families. Genetic counselors also may collaborate with others in health care research around genetic issues.

Christiana Care has had a long-standing academic relationship with Thomas Jefferson University and its Sidney Kimmel Medical College to educate and train the next generation of medical professionals.

“The role of genetic counselors is critical as we move forward in advancing medicine through genomics. We have only experienced the tip of the iceberg as to what this science will allow us to accomplish in our effort to improve the health of our patients,” said Nicholas J. Petrelli, M.D., Bank of America endowed medical director of the Helen F. Graham Cancer Center & Research Institute. “Congratulations to Ms. Ali-Khan Catts and Dr. Bartoshesky and the entire team for

their hard work and dedication in establishing this master's program and moving it through the lengthy accreditation process.”

“We are excited to begin our new graduate program and to welcome our first cohort of students this fall,” said Gerald B. Grunwald, Ph.D., dean of the Jefferson College of Biomedical Sciences at Jefferson. “We are especially grateful for the collaboration with Christiana Care Health System in this endeavor, one of our fellow members of the Delaware Health Science Alliance.”

“Genetic counseling is one of the fastest growing professions in the medical field,” said Zohra Ali-Khan Catts, MS, LCGC, director of [Genetic Counseling and Gene Testing](#) at the Graham Cancer Center, and co-director of the program. “There is a tremendous unmet need for these professionals in so many areas of health care.” Ali-Khan Catts leads a team of genetic counselors at the Graham Cancer Center who work closely with oncology teams and patients, translating the results of genetic studies and supporting patient care and treatment programs.

The Medical Director of the program is Louis Bartoshesky, M.D., MPH, senior pediatric clinical geneticist at the Graham Cancer Center. He also is a professor of Pediatrics at Jefferson, and a member of the medical staff at Nemours Children's Health System. He and program Co-Directors Ali-Khan- Catts and Rachael Brandt, Ph.D., MS, LCGC, have been working with several colleagues to develop the curriculum for the new master's program.

“Jefferson has widely respected academic programs in the biomedical sciences, as well as in its medical and health science colleges,” Dr. Bartoshesky said. “Students will have the opportunity to work inter-professionally with other students in other health care professions and in other master's and doctoral programs.” He cited such complementary programs as molecular diagnosis and cancer genetics.

In addition to working in hospital settings and cancer centers, genetic counselors are integrated into health care management and laboratory settings where they can help decide what tests are appropriate so that health care dollars are used wisely. The demand for these professionals is growing in almost every medical specialty, including cardiovascular, neurology, pediatrics, prenatal, reproductive and psychology. Christiana Care Health System Partners with Thomas Jefferson University in New Genetic Counseling Master's Degree Program

About Christiana Care Health System

Christiana Care Health System is one of the country's largest health care systems, ranking as the 22nd leading hospital in the nation and 11th on the East Coast in terms of admissions. The health system includes The Medical Group of Christiana Care, a network of primary care physicians, medical and surgical specialists as well as home health care, preventive medicine, rehabilitation services and patient/family advisors for core health care services. A not-for-profit teaching hospital affiliated with Sidney Kimmel Medical College at Thomas Jefferson University, Christiana Care is recognized as a regional center for excellence in cardiology, cancer and women's health services. Christiana Care has an extensive range of outpatient services, and through Christiana Care Quality Partners, Christiana Care works closely with its medical staff to achieve better health, better access to care and lower cost. Christiana Care is home to Delaware's only Level I trauma center, the highest capability center and the only one of its kind between Philadelphia and Baltimore. Christiana Care features a Level III neonatal intensive care unit, the only delivering hospital in Delaware that offers this highest level of care to the most critically ill

newborns. Christiana Care includes two hospitals with 1,100 patient beds. For more information about Christiana Care, visit www.christianacare.org/howeare.

####