

New BC-based genetic counselling service first of its kind in the world

By SMCBRIDE

Canada Research Chair and genetic counsellor Jehannine Austin has recently launched a provincial, psychiatric genetic counselling service in British Columbia. The Vancouver-based clinic offers free genetic counselling to individuals who live with a psychiatric diagnosis and/or their family members. This is the only clinic of its kind: no specialist psychiatric genetic counseling exists elsewhere in the world

Common explanations for mental illness often include a sense of blame and guilt: ‘Is this my fault?’ or ‘could I have prevented this?’ While there is no genetic testing for psychiatric disorders, the clinic offers individuals and families a very powerful service as it helps people better understand why they have a mental illness. The clinic’s counsellors can expose and reframe understandings of the causes of mental illness.

The service can help individuals and their families:

- Learn more about the causes of mental illness;
- Answer any questions about the causes of their or their family members’ mental illness;
- Address concerns about potential risks for their children or other family members.

The clinic is highly accessible to people throughout the province. In addition to being a free service for BC residents, the clinic welcomes referrals from all health care providers. Sessions are accessible in person, or through phone appointments, or Telehealth. The clinic also provides access to interpreters to address language barriers.

About the service:

- Prior to the appointments, the genetic counsellor will phone the client to discuss their family history;
- The genetic counselling appointments are approximately one hour in length, and these are accompanied by a follow-up phone call one month after the initial appointment;
- Further appointments can be booked if clients have remaining questions and concerns to discuss.

The clinic team is encouraging health care providers to refer their patients. For more information on the clinic and genetic counselling:

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