



Counselling in Practice: Supporting Individuals and Families

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GENETIC COUNSELLORS SOUTH AFRICA



SASHG
SOUTHERN AFRICAN SOCIETY
FOR HUMAN GENETICS



*A baby is born with Down
syndrome*

The parents are
shocked.

The mother asks:

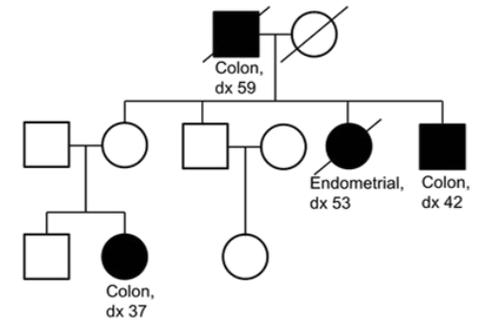
**“Did I do something
wrong?”**

What Is Genetic Counselling?

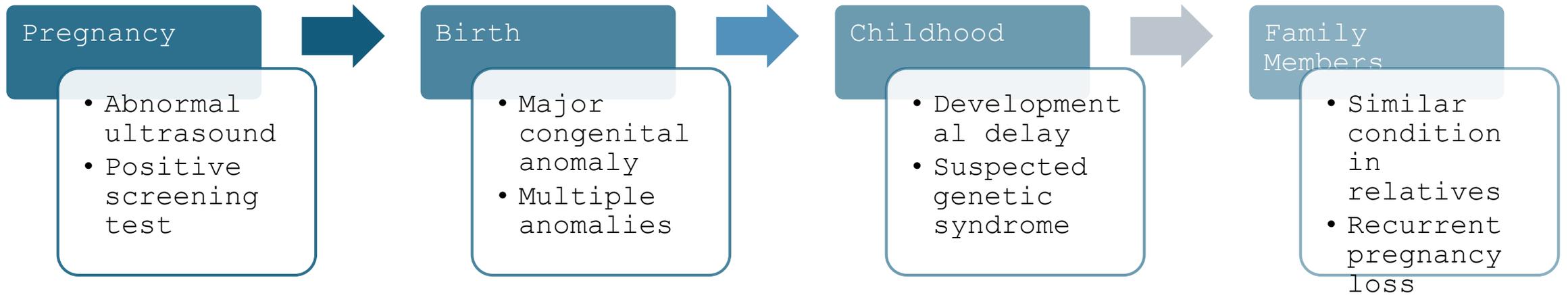
- Genetic counselling is a communication process that helps individuals and families to:
 - Understand a diagnosis
 - Understand the cause
 - Understand recurrence risk
 - Make informed decisions
 - Cope emotionally

What Do Genetic Counsellors Actually Do?

- In practice, genetic counsellors:
 - Explain genetic conditions in simple language
 - Interpret genetic test results
 - Discuss recurrence risks
 - Support decision-making
 - Facilitate family communication
 - Provide emotional support
 - Coordinate referrals



Where Does Genetic Counselling Fit?

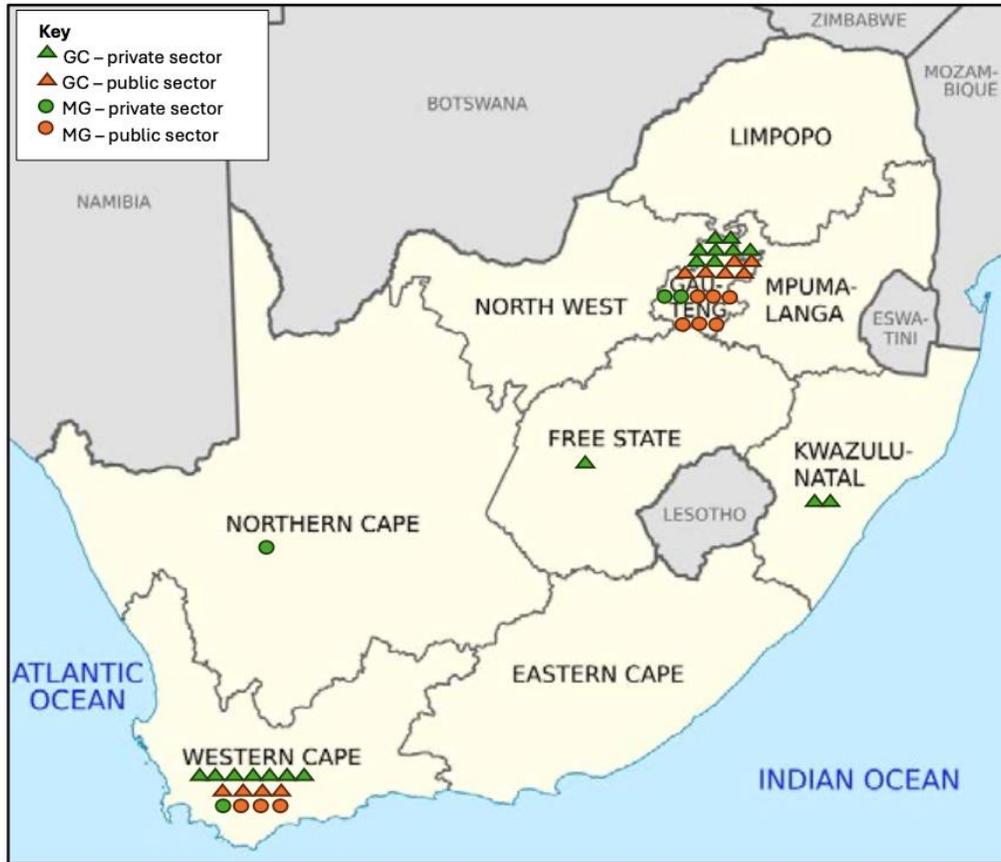




The Emotional Impact

- Common reactions:
 - Shock
 - Guilt
 - Blame
 - Fear
 - Stigma

The South African Context



- In South Africa:
 - Access to genetic services is limited
 - Many diagnoses are made in district/regional hospitals
 - Healthcare workers are often the first point of contact
 - Cultural and religious beliefs

When Should You Refer?

- Refer for Genetic Counselling if there
 - A major congenital anomaly
 - Multiple anomalies
 - Dysmorphic features
 - A family history of a similar condition
 - Recurrent miscarriages
 - A positive prenatal screening result
 - Parents with concerns about recurrence



What Genetic Counselling is NOT

- Genetic counselling is **NOT**:
 - Only about termination
 - Only for rare diseases
 - Only for private patients
 - About telling families what to do

Key Take-Home Message

- Behind every congenital disorder is a family seeking understanding.
- Clear, compassionate communication matters.
- Early referral improves support and future planning.

