# Talking to Others about Being At-Risk

Dr. Bonnie L. Hennig-Trestman HD Reach-NC HD Education Day April 7, 2018

### Why Don't People Talk about HD?

#### Find it stressful

- •Was not discussed growing up
- Family guilt
- Person with HD denies illness
- Family doesn't know you know

#### Why Should People Talk about HD?

# SUPPORT!!



- Family
- Friends
- Dating
- Co-Workers
- Employers
- Health Care Professionals

# Choices

 There is no "right" or "wrong" way to disclose a HD status.

Each person needs to make their own decision.

# Important!

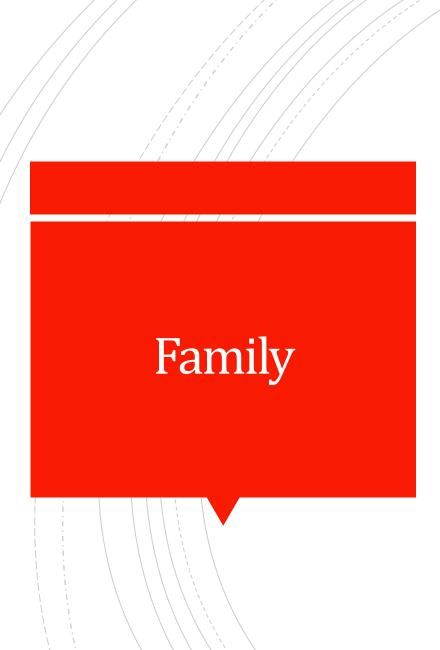
- First, think about consequences
- Think about relationships (directly and indirectly) and how discussing HD can impact these
- Think about your goal
- If you are an adult who is at-risk, you should (at-least) look into benefits and coverage

### Types of Benefits and Coverage

- Health Insurance (Group plans cannot ask for personal info)
- Dental Insurance
- Life Insurance (Might include a rider to use funds prior to death)
- Disability Insurance (Long and short term)
- Long Term Care Insurance (Pot of money to use for self-care)

#### Remember!

 Once you discuss information or post it ANYWHERE on the Internet, you have no control of where that information might go or who will have access to it.



- Many times family members feel the best way to protect each other is to avoid discussions.
- Usually causes more issues and stress in the long run.
- You can decrease the stress by having a discussion before gene testing. "I'm thinking about going for testing":
  - Would you want to know?
  - Would you want to go with me?
  - Would you want to find out the results?

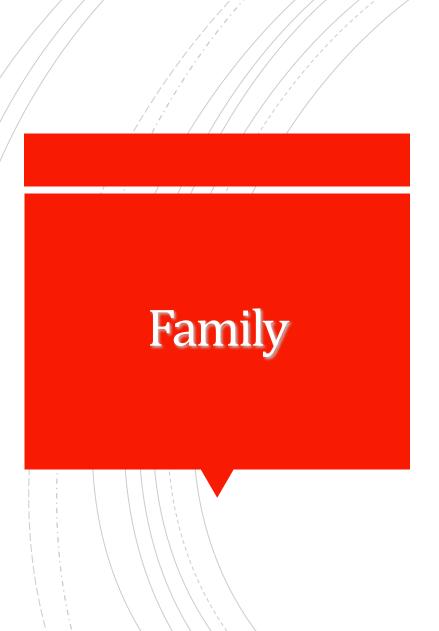
## Family

- If you tell someone in your family:
  - Will they tell others ?
  - Will someone else find out "accidently"?
  - Will you be burdening them by asking them not to tell?

### Family: Cons and Pros

Cons:

- Keeping a secret can be stressful and can "take a toll"
- Need to keep track of what you said to whom
- Need to keep track of what others might say
- Pros:
  - Talking to family is usually less stressful than anticipated
  - Talking to family in advance gives control
  - Families can be a great support



- Know that some family members might not want to have this discussion. Be respectful of this.
- Remember, just because your family did or did not discuss HD in the past does not mean you need to do the same.
- Make sure you talk through your feelings with a counselor. Then you can move forward with your plan.

### Friends

- There are many ways to talk to friends about your HD status:
  - "Hi my name is ... I'm at-risk for HD"
  - Wear HD related items
  - Form trust, then talk about HD
  - Never talk about it

#### Cons:

- Keeping this news secret can be stressful
- Need to keep track of what you said to whom
- Need to keep track of what others might say (intentionally or unintentionally)
- If sharing, fear of losing friends
- Pros:

Friends:

**Cons and Pros** 

 Friends can be a great support (find out who is really there for you)



- There are many ways to talk to a new significant other about your HD status:
  - "Hi my name is ... I'm at-risk for HD"
  - Wear HD related items
  - Form a relationship, then talk about HD
  - Never talk about it

### Dating: Cons and Pros

- Cons:
  - Keeping this news secret can be stressful
  - Fear that you are lying to them
  - If sharing, fear they will not stay in the relationship
  - If sharing, fear that you are "damaged goods"
- Pros:
  - Find out who will be willing to stay in the relationship
  - Significant other can be a great support

# **Co-Workers**

- Many ways to speak to co-workers
- Need to determine the goal
- Consider the consequences
- If you decide to talk about HD, minimize potential damage:
  - When
  - How
  - Who

### Co-Workers: Cons and Pros

#### Cons:

- Keeping this news secret can be stressful
- If sharing, will co-workers "judge" you or question decisions
- If sharing, will co-workers use this against you
- Pros:
  - Co-workers can be supportive
  - Requesting time-off might be easier

# Employers

- Many ways to speak to employers
- Need to determine the goal
- Consider the consequences
- Talk to supervisor and HR
- Be aware that if using health insurance through employer, employer will have access to info

#### Employers: Cons and Pros

#### Cons:

 Employers might indirectly use info against person at-risk

#### Pros:

Might receive support from employer

### Health Care Professionals

- Be cautious about disclosing information prior to obtaining benefits
- Any individual benefit (compared to a group policy) can and will require medical records
- "Doctor Hopping", once you have medical information, can be illegal if you sign a medical insurance policy with a false claim
- Take care of benefits FIRST

#### Cons:

- Not disclosing may cause symptoms to go unnoticed
- Once disclosed this information will become part of the medical record

#### Pros:

Health Care

**Professionals:** 

**Cons and Pros** 

- Talking to health care professionals can help to create baseline for the future
- Health care professionals can refer to specialists

# **Final Words**

- No wrong or right way to talk to others
- Keeping secrets can be stressful
- Important not to decide for others
- Others can be supportive
- Talk to people who have "gone through it"
- Important to take care of your self