

Staffing Pipeline Creation: Clinical Research Internship for Undergraduate BIPOC Students

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1. Background

During calendar year (CY) 2021, record high rates of seasoned clinical research staff opted to leave their job for a variety of reasons. Also, in CY 2021 the National Cancer Institute (NCI) added a new component to the Cancer Center Support Grant to ensure that all designated centers account for diversity, equity and inclusion among faculty and staff. This has driven NCI-Designated Cancer Centers to critically assess their workforce demographics and develop strategies to engage and attract Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) individuals into the workforce.

Collectively, underrepresented racial and ethnic groups make up 30 percent of the population in the United States and in North Carolina (NC), however, there is not an equitable reflection of these groups in health care professions in NC (Kreuter). To ensure adequate representation of BIPOC staff working at Lineberger Comprehensive Cancer Center (LCCC), leadership recognized the need for a more formal program to inform and expose local BIPOC students to clinical research employment opportunities.

The internship program described herein focuses on supporting oncology workforce development among local BIPOC undergraduate students with the intent to attract students to careers in clinical research at LCCC. Our initial effort is a pilot program for students at North Carolina Central University, a Historically Black College/University, designed to expose them to oncology clinical research careers and support professional development.

2. Goals

- 1) Create a 2-year longitudinal summer internship for 5 BIPOC undergraduate students at NCCU as an avenue for permanent employment at LCCC in the clinical research workforce
- 2) Connect NCCU undergraduate interns to scientific mentors in cancer clinical research
- 3) Conduct semi-structured and/or focus groups to explore the lived experiences of the interns and mentors
- 4) Determine the impact of the internship on students' perceptions of career and graduate opportunities in clinical research
- 5) Evaluate the strengths, growth opportunities, and barriers to participation in the internship program

3. Solutions and Methods

The curriculum will support years 1 and 2 of the 10-week summer internship. The clinical rotations focus on shadowing oncology care and research activities in outpatient cancer clinics. Students are also given the opportunity to shadow in labs associated with tissue procurement and genomic research. Professional development and mentorship are additional core curriculum components. Every student is assigned a mentor to meet with bi-weekly during the summers and quarterly during the intervening school year.

4. Outcomes

Key metrics used to measure the success of the program include both quantitative and qualitative data collection via an electronic survey as well as semi-structured and/or focus groups. These data will be

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evaluated in collaboration with the UNC Odum Institute for Research in Social Science, which will provide an in-depth analysis and create a key summary report.

5. Lessons Learned and Future Directions

The inception and development of this internship program underscores the critical importance of a collaborative approach in program development, including the clinical research leadership team, cancer research training and education coordination (CRTEC), community outreach and engagement (COE), and the NCCU leadership.

Figure:

Attachment 1: Lineberger Comprehensive Cancer Center’s Clinical Research Internship Program Curriculum

Timeframe	Summer 1				Summer 2		
Weeks	1-2	3-6	7-9	10	1-2	3-9	10
Tasks							
Orientation of trainees to their summer	X				X		
Lived experience survey	X			X	X		X
NIH Individual Development Plan	X			X	X		
Professional Development Training	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Clinical Trials Training	X	X					
Clinical rotations		X			X		
Symposium with input on experiences				X			X
Mentorship in clinical/oncology fields	X*	X*	X*	X	X*	X*	X*
Career fair			X			X	
Work in area of interest						X	
Hire and train interested interns							X