

Investing in the Future: Protocol Review Mentorship Program for Oncology Fellows at the Duke Cancer Institute

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1. Background

Scientific peer review is critical for pre-IRB oversight of protocols involving cancer patients, but this process is presently not formally taught to trainees. We sought to overcome this unmet need and to develop future academic oncology faculty with expertise in protocol review and oversight, the Duke Cancer Institute's PRMC and the Office of Cancer Research Training & Education Coordination (CRTEC) designed a PRMC Fellows Program for rising third year Duke medical oncology fellows.

2. Goals

- 1) Create a mentorship program for rising third year Duke medical oncology fellows
- 2) Give fellows the skills, training, and confidence to participate as full members in the PRMC
- 3) Collect metrics on this pilot program to improve its efficacy and expand to other trainee groups

3. Solutions and Methods

In 2022, the PRMC and CRTEC offices created and administered a survey to fellows to gauge their interest in participating in a PRMC mentorship program. Following positive responses, we developed and pilot tested a 6-month long curriculum.

Each fellow attended a virtual welcome training with the lead PRMC chair, the associate director of CRTEC and PRMC staff. Fellows completed an electronic IRB training with PRMC staff to learn how to navigate the system and review protocol assignments. They were then paired with an existing PRMC medical reviewer mentor for six months.

In this initial pilot, three mentors and three mentees were matched based on availability, not fields of interest. Mentees attended one PRMC meeting per month with their mentor for six total meetings.

Mentors/mentees met before the meeting (virtually or in person) to discuss assignments and conduct review training. During months 1-3 the mentor presented the review; during months 4-6 the mentee presented the review to the full committee with the mentor review in parallel. Following each meeting, the pairs were encouraged to debrief. Additional mentee training opportunities included 30-minute virtual trainings with PRMC statistician, pharmacist and patient advocate roles and a program mid-point meeting with lead PRMC chair.

4. Outcomes

At the program mid-point, mentors and mentees were surveyed regarding the program and opportunities for improvement.

Overall, mentee and mentor responses were positive. All three fellows indicated that they were "likely" or "extremely likely" to join a PRMC like committee once they became faculty. One mentee wrote, "The valuable opportunity to participate in engaged discussions about clinical trial design with experienced faculty has been the highlight of the program."

At the conclusion of the 6-month program, the fellows were presented with a certificate of completion for their own file.

5. Lessons Learned and Future Directions

The mid-point survey and the check in with the lead PRMC chair allowed fellows to express any concerns or critiques that they had of the program. Based on this feedback, the PRMC staff edited the initial interest survey, to include detailed information about program requirements. This program is ideal for future academic oncologists, including medical, radiation, surgical, and pathology fellows or residents or non-physician trainees who will be conducting clinical research involving patients with cancer.