Implementation of Small Group Trainings to Expedite Initial Onboarding for Clinical Research Staff and Increase Connection Between New Employees – One Year Review

D. Kreitner, M. Wanchoo, D. Castro, R. Lewis, C. Burgin

OHSU Knight Cancer Institute

1. Background
OHSU Knight Cancer Institute (KCI) provides individual onboarding for new clinical research staff, consisting of ~50 topics over ~30 sessions. The target timeline for completion is 150 days, requiring one to two training sessions per week. When fully staffed, KCI employs two full-time trainers, who can each conduct ~20-25 sessions per week.

In late 2019, there was a trainer vacancy. In early 2020, due to COVID-19 and uncertain financial projections, OHSU implemented a hiring freeze. When the hiring freeze ended in August 2020, numerous staff were hired to backfill vacancies. This trend continued into 2021. A second trainer was hired in January 2021. By then, the average time to complete onboarding had increased to 297 days. In addition, COVID-19 modified operations required remote work that hindered staff connection.

2. Goals
Primary goal: to decrease onboarding completion time by increasing trainer touchpoints per employee
Secondary goal: to increase staff connection and engagement

3. Solutions and Methods
Small group trainings were implemented in August 2021, consisting of two to four trainees (based on start date, role, availability) and meeting weekly for 12-16 weeks. Trainers identified ~30 topics amenable to group trainings, with the remainder covered during one-on-one sessions.

4. Outcomes
Since implementation, the average time to complete onboarding has drastically decreased, from 297 days for those who started in 2021-Q1 to 146 days for those who started in 2022-Q3.

We requested formal feedback in November 2022 from trainees who had completed initial onboarding and finished their first year at KCI. Survey recipients included a mix of those who did and did not participate in small group training.

We received eight responses from those who participated in small groups (six clinical research coordinators, one data manager, and one regulatory project manager).

The survey asked six questions regarding the small group cohort trainings, as summarized below:

1. The small group cohort training was an effective approach:
   Extremely effective (3), very effective (1), Moderately effective (1), Slightly effective (2)
2. How well did you like the small cohort sessions with CRQA trainer:
   Like a great deal (4), like somewhat (2), neutral (1), dislike somewhat (1)
3. The group trainings introduced me to other team processes:
   Strongly agree (5), neutral (1), somewhat disagree (1), strongly disagree (1)
4. I felt comfortable asking questions during group session:

Strongly agree (4), somewhat agree (3), neutral (1)
5. I felt comfortable reaching out to members on the group outside of sessions:
   Strongly agree (5), somewhat agree (1), neutral (1), strongly disagree (1)
6. I interacted with group members outside of group sessions:
   Strongly agree (3), somewhat agree (2), somewhat disagree (2), strongly disagree (1)

5. Lessons Learned and Future Directions:

Overall, the feedback regarding the small groups has been positive. Moving forward, we will continue to utilize small group trainings, as appropriate, in conjunction with one-on-one trainings.

Currently, the average duration of onboarding includes a mix of trainees who did and did not participate in small groups. A future direction of this project will be to delineate the two averages for a direct comparison and specifically track/measure individual touch points per trainee.

Figure