

The Importance of a Dedicated Clinical Trainer in the Hybrid Environment

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1. Background

University of North Carolina (UNC) Lineberger Comprehensive Cancer Center (LCCC) Clinical Trial Office (CTO) transitioned to a hybrid environment in 2020, limiting onsite support and training for study coordinators (SCs). Training needs were further exacerbated by onboarding 87 clinical staff from 2020 to 2023 to replace losses from the Great Resignation and to grow the clinical team by 34.4 percent from 2019 to 2023.

2. Goals

To address these challenges, LCCC needed to develop a productive method to provide training for new clinical staff and to retrain existing clinical staff. The goals of this project were to create a subject matter expert clinical trainer position; assess the current training structure; address the challenges of training in a hybrid environment; ease the training burden for other roles; and create a robust, structured clinical training program.

3. Solutions and Methods

The clinical trainer role was developed with the following responsibilities: provide hands-on onboarding and training to clinical research staff to ensure safe and efficient conduct of oncology clinical trials, provide expert level knowledge in clinical trial practices and regulations, serve as a frontline expert to develop the performance and expertise of new staff and support the assessment of existing staff in ensuring compliant clinical trial coordination, and champion a collaborative relationship with staff and other departments.

The clinical trainer implemented the following training solutions:

1. Resources and Remedies Club, including lectures and hands-on practical curriculum
2. One-to-one mentorship program for junior-level positions (assistant SCs)
3. Onsite training support for study visits followed by an assessment and action plan
4. Lecture-based training classes for the CTO
5. Established workload threshold of five SCs and two data coordinators paired with one trainer to prevent overload and burnout
6. A biweekly communication plan between managers and clinical trainers to share training progress, induct new staff into the training program, and request re-training of current staff

4. Outcomes

The Resources and Remedies Club has improved our culture by creating a sense of community in a hybrid environment, encouraging shared learning, and focusing on training new coordinators to be successful in their role. The Assistant Study Coordinator Mentorship Program has provided a global viewpoint of clinical research for employees and enables them to gain experience to advance their careers. An onsite presence improved the office culture, eased the training burden on other employees, and led to the discovery and resolution of office-wide training gaps. Biweekly assessments have increased collaboration and ensured harmonious communication amongst leadership to best aid new staff. In part due to the success of the clinical training program, since 2020, 60 staff were hired as

contract, 30 converted to permanent positions, and 12 are in the process of being invited to convert to permanent positions.

5. Lessons Learned and Future Directions

The success of the clinical trainer subject matter expert training role led to the expansion of trainers into other units (e.g., regulatory). Future directions include recruitment of a training program manager to oversee the subject matter expert trainers and program within each functional group, and to educate trainers on best practices for training adult learners.