

## **Nuances of Joint Collaboration in an Academic Partnership in Developing Clinical Research Professionals**

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### **1. Background**

Like other cancer centers, Rutgers Cancer Institute (RCI) faces challenges finding clinical research professionals for increasingly complex oncology trials. To address the issue, RCI implemented practices recommended by the Association of American Cancer Institute (AACI) Clinical Research Innovation's (CRI) Clinical Trials Office (CTO) Staff Retention Task Force, such as offering remote work, restructuring roles, and expanding training opportunities. RCI has also explored long-term solutions -clinical trial internships and collaborative partnerships. One such partnership is with Rutgers MS Clinical Research Management (RMSCRM) program to offset clinical research staff support; students develop competencies and skills in clinical research operations through a structured academic master's program and onsite preceptorship.

### **2. Goals**

To collaborate with an academic program to precept clinical research professional students through onsite clinical research educational experiences, providing students with mentored hands-on training in the conduct of a clinical trial with supervision and feedback.

### **3. Solutions and Methods**

Students participate in a 16-month full-time hybrid master's program through RMSCRM. In addition to course work, students have over 500 hours of onsite supervised clinical research educational experiences facilitating hands-on training in the conduct of clinical research. Coursework and clinical experience are based on The Joint Task Force for Clinical Trial Competency. Students are placed at clinical research sites for clinical experiences based on their backgrounds and preferences. Placements offer experiences in one of the operational pillars - Clinical, Administrative, and Regulatory/Compliance. In each area, students have opportunities to develop competencies and skills that will be helpful in future employment opportunities. Some details of the clinical experience include:

- Summer clinical experience – 20 hours/week, 10-week semester
- Fall clinical experience – 13.5 hours/week, 15-week semester

### **4. Outcomes**

While in its early stages, the partnership between RCINJ and RMSCRM has demonstrated positive interactions between students and clinical sites. Site Preceptors enjoy helping students understand the nuances of working in an NCI-designated cancer center, while students relish the fast-paced oncology clinical trial setting, which leads to opportunities to identify potential candidates for clinical trial area positions.

The collaboration is now in its second year, placing three students in the first cohort and three in the second. Students from the inaugural placements gained quality, regulatory, and clinical research operations skills. Two of these students are employed in clinical research, while the third has paused their employment search due to family commitments.

*Category: Training, Career Development, and Staff Retention – Work in progress*

For 2023/2024, three students will be placed in clinical experiences at RCINJ. One of the students completed phlebotomy training and will use this skill for collecting clinical trial specimens in the clinical setting. This exciting new aspect of the program, phlebotomy training, will enhance the marketability of graduating students.

#### **5. Lessons Learned and Future Directions**

Through compassionate work with each student, successful clinical research site placement enabled fine-tuning their experience to meet the needs of both the student and clinical site. Weekly meetings with RMSCRM and RCINJ leadership helped to develop risk mitigation strategies. Students gained a more profound appreciation of the operational processes in oncology clinical trials through meaningful experiences at clinical sites. Future clinical focus areas include clinical trial finance, regulatory compliance, clinical trial laboratory work, and data management.