

Efficient Onboarding Strategies for Clinical Research Coordinators: Enhancing Collaboration, Accelerating Independence, and Elevating Patient-Centric Research

E. Mitchell, A. Blangiardo, O. Sharma, A. Elgayar, R. Mahmoud, A. Kreitman, D. Catamero, A. Lieberman-cribbin, E. Herrscher, A. Dhadwal

The Tisch Cancer Institute at Mount Sinai

1. Background

Clinical Research Coordinators (CRC) play a critical role in the success of a clinical research site. Typically CRC roles experience rapid turnover as individuals often pursue higher professional degrees while actively serving as a CRC. CRCs typically stay in the role for 1-3 years, and often enter the role with little to no prior clinical research experience. Overcoming this steep learning curve while maintaining timelines for departmental goals requires an efficient and thorough training process. This standardized process aims not only to onboard new CRCs to reach independence within two months but also to facilitate the training of recently hired CRCs to further mentor new team members. This strategic approach was essential for ensuring employee retention, empowering CRCs to excel in their roles, and fostering opportunities that enhanced both the new CRC's professional development and the progress of the program as a whole.

2. Goals

The primary objective was to implement a new standard departmental procedure for CRC onboarding that streamlines the training process for new hires, thus shortening the onboarding period without sacrificing training quality.

3. Solutions and Methods

In the Multiple Myeloma (MM) Research team, an innovative departmental onboarding process was introduced, assigning each trainee CRC to a dedicated trainer CRC for their entire training duration. This collaborative relationship mirrored the team environment, establishing an immediate support source and facilitating efficient completion of institutional new employee orientation. A standardized checklist, developed collaboratively by the Clinical operation, data, and regulatory teams complemented this intense onboarding process. The checklist, shared between the trainer CRC and the trainee CRC, acted as a tangible measure of the trainee CRCs progress that ensured an interdisciplinary understanding of fundamental research procedures crucial to the CRC role.

4. Outcomes

By designing the onboarding process as a collaborative effort, the MM Research team environment and team workflows were instilled in the trainee early on. The shared document, created by all teams, significantly reduced the time required for the trainee to understand workflows and their role's contribution to the team's success. Additionally, shadowing one CRC during the onboarding process allowed trainees to witness real-time project start and finishes, instilling confidence in handling unpredictable situations that often arise in a fast-paced work environment. The goal was not for trainees to memorize details but rather to empower them to address any issue through collaboration for optimal patient outcomes.

5. Lessons Learned and Future Directions

The MM Research Team's initiative successfully overhauled the training process, leading to the standardized training of eight newly hired CRCs within 18 months. Notably, one new CRC trained three

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others, emphasizing the efficiency of the new onboarding procedures. All eight CRCs endorsed that this training process enabled them to be fully independent and leading clinical research studies within one month from their first day as CRCs. This efficient onboarding method not only increased employee retention but, more importantly, elevated patient care through interdisciplinary cooperation. Efficient onboarding ensured seamless employee transitions between studies, eliminating gaps or disruptions in patient enrollment which ultimately enhanced research quality through improved patient care and communication with study sponsors.