

A unique partnership between the Office of Military Affiliated Communities and the UChicago Cancer Center Clinical Trials Office leads to career pathways in clinical research

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BACKGROUND

The University of Chicago Comprehensive Cancer Center Cancer Clinical Trials Support Office (CTSO) top priority is to recruit diverse individuals who are highly motivated and aligned with our cancer center mission and vision. The Chicagoland clinical research hiring market is competitive with approximately 5 academic medical centers who conduct clinical research. Based on internal job market research, sampling titles across 55 clinical research titles, the state of Illinois is in the top 5 states with unique job posting by region with over 4700 competing employers nationwide. Due to the competitive market, rates of internal staff turnover, and growing demand for clinical research professionals, the CTSO needed to find new ways to recruit top talent but also look for ways to enhance our workforce diversity and inclusion.

HYPOTHESIS/OBJECTIVE

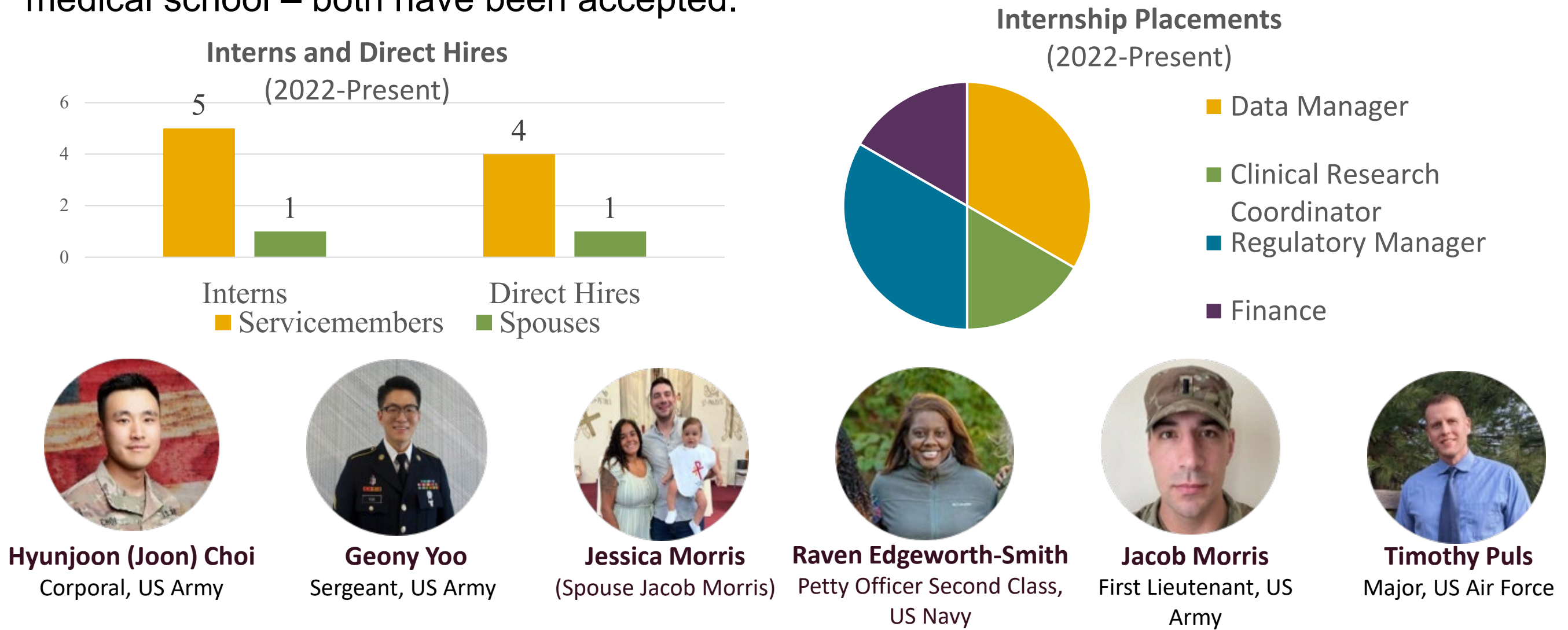
- Our goals:
- 1.) Increase exposure and skill building for clinical research jobs by identifying new populations with translatable skills.
 - 2.) Create training and education pipelines (leveraging Community Outreach and Engagement (COE), Cancer Research Training Education Coordination (CRTEC), and Plans to Enhance Diversity (PED) to identify and hire the next generation of clinical research professionals.
 - 3.) Hire, train, and retain a diverse, equitable, and inclusive CTSO team.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The University Provost’s Equal Opportunity Programs launched the Department of Defense (DoD) SkillBridge Program through the Office for Military-Affiliated Communities (OMAC). This program connects servicemembers and spouses to partners who provide civilian work experience through specific industry training, apprenticeships, or internships during the last 180 days of military service with the goal of easing the transition to civilian careers. Many veterans, transitioning servicemembers and their spouses have experience in operations and logistics or have served as medical professionals in the military. We knew these diverse skills could qualify them for career opportunities within the field of clinical research which led to a partnership between the CTSO and OMAC. Through this unique partnership, the CTSO worked with OMAC to connect these individuals with opportunities in the clinical research space. This collaboration allows the CTSO to provide military servicemembers (and their spouses) with internship opportunities or a full-time position in clinical research roles.

RESULTS

Since the launch of the OMAC partnership, 6 candidates (5 servicemembers, 1 spouse) were selected to take part in the CTSO internship program. Internships spanned across data management (2), clinical research coordination (1), regulatory (2), and finance (1). We successfully converted 5 of the 6 interns to direct hires (4 servicemembers, 1 spouse) and the CTSO is recruiting additional interns this year (Figure 1). Of note, 2 of the direct hire interns gained medical research experience which made them stronger applicants for medical school – both have been accepted.



FUTURE DIRECTIONS

This pilot partnership highlights the transferable skills of highly trained servicemembers who have worked hard to protect our country and are now protecting the rights, safety and welfare of patients who consent to trials. Essential skills for complex oncology trials include performing under pressure, accountability, adherence to protocols, health and safety awareness, leadership, teamwork, and integrity. The CTSO benefited from engaging skilled interns and was able to create a pipeline in the saturated Chicago job market. According to OMAC, transitioning from military service poses challenges for servicemembers and their families, including housing, food insecurities, and employment. This partnership allows servicemembers (our heroes) to ease transitional challenges, gain invaluable work experience, and get a head start on their next career after military service.

As for future directions, we have plans to expand the CTSO/OMAC program by adding administrative support, developing capstone projects for each intern, and growing this pathway program in partnership with COE, CRTEC and PED.