The Elephant in the Room – Onboarding of New Staff in an Evolving Research Landscape Plagued by Turnover

Dina Farhat BS, MS; Jaclyn Ventimiglia BS, CCRP; Elizabeth Horvat BA, MSEd, CCRP; Lindsay Casetta BSBA, CCRP; Joanne Mancini RN, CCRP

Barbara Ann Karmanos Cancer Institute, Wayne State University

NCI Designated Comprehensive Cancer Center

Introduction

As an NCI-designated Comprehensive Cancer Center, the Karmanos Cancer Institute's Clinical Trials Office (CTO) established its initial orientation program (IOP) in 2007. The curriculum encompassed ten role-specific modules designed to highlight the responsibilities of the Clinical Research Coordinator (CRC). The CTO Education Manager facilitated these modules over the course of 16 weeks. However, like many institutions, the CTO recognized the changing landscape of oncology research due to the increasing complexity of protocols, staff turnover, and institutional expansion- which in our case included the acquisition of 12 statewide cancer centers. In order to support these changes, the CTO staff has grown over 200% in the last 10 years. As such, the need for a more comprehensive and robust orientation program was identified.

Methods

Realizing it was no longer feasible for one trainer to adequately onboard new staff, the Education Manager recruited leaders in the CTO, including supervisors and SMEs, to participate in the establishment of an enhanced formal orientation program (EOP) in December of 2016. The EOP is now well established with the following enhancements:

- Orientees complete 16 – 1.5 hour modules over the course of a structured six-week schedule
- Expanded the orientation program to include statewide staff via Web-Ex
- Developed and operationalized role specific competencies
- Re-established a minimum requirement of 80% pass rate on post-module assessments
- Incorporated "hands on" practicums, departmental overviews and opportunities to shadow
- Developed a Post-Orientation Survey, providing feedback and opportunities for continuous improvement
- Implemented quarterly trainer meetings to evaluate and brainstorm areas of possible program expansion and enhancements.

Modules

1. Overview of Orientation
2. Introduction to Clinical Trials
3. The Research Team
4. Human Research Protection & Overview of Regulatory Coordinator Role
5. The Research Protocol & Review of Patient Eligibility (Hands on Practice)
6. Informed Consent
7. Source Documentation and Research Charts
8. Central Data Management (The KCI Network)
9. Oncology 101 / Assessment of a Clinical Trial Patient (Research Nurse)
10. RECIST 1.1 / Tumor Assessments
11. Adverse Events & Deviations
12. CTCAE / Toxicity Assessments
13. OnCore (CTMS)– Protocol Coordinator / Clinical Research Associate Role Overview
14. IND Overview
15. Quality Assurance Overview
16. Overview of Pre and Post Awards

Experiences

- Multi-Disciplinary Team (MDT) Tumor Board Exposure
- Feasibility Review and Operations Committee (FROC) Observation
- Shadow Experience with Research Nurse or Non-Physician Provider
- Bone Marrow Transplant Floor, PK Laboratory, Bio specimen Laboratory, and Pharmacy, Radiation Oncology Center Tours
- Opportunity to Visit Statewide Network Cancer Center(s)

Results

One hundred employees have completed the EOP since its debut in 2017. Modules are facilitated by 17 highly trained SMEs, who continuously enhance content to ensure that the most up to date information and practices are disseminated. These sessions occur in an interactive group setting which allows orientees to cultivate professional relationships among staff in various departments. Upon evaluation, supervisors indicate that employees who successfully complete the EOP are more equipped to take on workloads at earlier time points when compared to employees trained through the IOP. Furthermore, the Quality Assurance Team has indicated CRCs display an increased, in-depth understanding of the multifaceted nature of clinical research when providing audit responses.

Conclusions

The evolving landscape of oncology research necessitates robust, comprehensive and accelerated training for new staff. Our EOP provides orientees with the knowledge and skills necessary to take on rigorous workloads in an expedited time frame. While we recognize the benefit of providing our employees with the opportunity to develop greater proficiency in their roles, we also recognize the elephant in the room – the high turnover within the clinical research setting is a problem plaguing many institutions, including our own. Currently, 79% of staff trained through the EOP remain employed at the CTO. This tends to beg the question: Is our accelerated comprehensive training program benefiting our institution, or are we better preparing employees for transition to industry?