

Development of an Integrated Orientation Program Using the Joint Task Force Core Competencies for Research Professionals

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1. Background

Orientation and onboarding are critical components in the long-term success and retention of new staff. This is especially true in clinical research which requires not only a unique skill set but is also constantly evolving as the complexity of clinical trials increases. Historically, the Clinical Trials Office (CTO) at the Vanderbilt-Ingram Cancer Center has not offered a competency-based orientation and onboarding program, but rather relied heavily on peer-to-peer training. This resulted in inconsistent performance, a lack of clear understanding of the research process, decreased staff satisfaction, and retention challenges.

2. Goals

The goal of this project was to develop and implement an orientation and onboarding program based on the Joint Task Force (JTF) core competencies appropriate for all new staff regardless of their role within the organization. Measuring the success of the program is ongoing and should be reflected in increased staff satisfaction, lower employee turnover, more consistent practices, and a better understanding of clinical research and how each role impacts the success of clinical trials.

3. Solutions and Methods

Utilizing the JTF model, competencies were mapped to staff roles and responsibilities using a cross-functional and multi-level group of staff from the CTO. The entry level competencies were then used to develop the framework for the integrated orientation program. Training was developed using both existing resources and, if unavailable, new material created based on institutional standards, federal regulations, and international guidelines. After approval by CTO leadership, the first cohort of new employees completed integrated orientation in February 2019.

4. Outcomes

While quantitative data are still pending, qualitative data in the form of staff and manager feedback obtained via surveys and one-on-one meetings have been overwhelmingly positive. Staff have reported the integrated orientation program enabled them to become familiar with the organization, feel prepared when they assumed their new roles, and afforded them ample opportunity to ask questions. Additionally, many new staff members felt the time spent in orientation allowed them to begin developing a workplace support system. Managers also noted new staff members were well-equipped to enter the preceptorship portion of orientation and had a better understanding of the research process.

5. Lessons Learned

Category: Training and Quality Assurance – Work In Progress

From the beginning, the implementation of this program required clear and concise communication ensuring buy-in from all stakeholders. Establishing expectations for both preceptors and managers has been essential for the success of the program and has helped to ensure that everyone involved has had the tools they need.

Although the feedback has been positive, we recognize the need for standardized tools to assess staff satisfaction and the effectiveness of orientation. Moving forward, the data gathered from these tools will help ensure integrated orientation continues to meet the needs of new staff members, contributes to the well-being of the organization, and positively impacts the future of clinical research.