

# Does Mentorship Improve CRC Retention Rates and Employee Satisfaction?

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## Background

The Helen Diller Family Comprehensive Cancer Center (HDFCCC) Clinical Research Support Office (CRSO) experiences high staff turnover of nearly 50% annually. The CRSO hires, trains, and manages all cancer clinical research staff. Of the CRSO's 130 employees, 100 are Clinical Research Coordinators (CRCs). CRC turnover accounts for the majority of staff loss. High turnover results in loss of institutional knowledge, lower productivity, higher costs, and lower staff morale. Possible barriers to retention include low engagement and a lack of growth opportunities.

Many CRCs are recent graduates from undergraduate or masters' programs with little to no professional or clinical research experience. We seek out candidates who will remain in the role for a minimum of two years as most CRCs will need six months of training before they function at full capacity. While a majority of these staff work at HDFCCC for two years, some stay for less time.

Some CRCs may leave the university because they lack growth—either in particular areas or titles. While leadership opportunities often open up across the 13 distinct disease programs that comprise the CRSO, staff may not view them as a favorable option. Since programs function independently, staff are siloed and develop a personal devotion to their disease program and its patients and clinicians. Additionally, programs vary in size and scope of work. The smallest program comprises one Clinical Research Manager (CRM) and one CRC, whereas a larger program comprises one CRM, two Clinical Research Supervisors (CRS), one Protocol Project Manager (PPM), one Senior CRC (Sr. CRC), and fifteen CRCs. A CRC in a small program is unlikely to be as familiar with these other roles.

Based on the HDFCCC programmatic structure and inherent professional growth limitations, we have developed a mentorship program to match CRCs and Sr. CRCs with more seasoned UCSF staff mentors. The intent of the program is to expose staff to roles outside of their disease group, break down silos that exist within programs, and foster a supportive environment to openly discuss professional goals and ways to develop skills to work towards achieving those goals.

## Metrics/Goals to be Achieved

The goals of the mentorship program include fostering community within the HDFCCC and providing professional development, leadership, and skill-building opportunities to both mentors and mentees.

The mentorship program is considered successful if the participating mentees work at the HDFCCC longer than the median length of time that staff in their same type of role typically stay. The median length of time that CRCs and Sr. CRCs work at the HDFCCC is being calculated and will be included in the poster.

We will also survey mentees and mentors before and after the completion of the program to evaluate employee satisfaction. This qualitative data will provide real time feedback on how each participant viewed the program, and the effectiveness of various aspects: 1:1 mentor/mentee meetings, group events, and overall format of the program.

## Methods

We opened the call for applications to the mentorship program in November 2019. Of 100 eligible staff, 25 applied to be mentees. We selected seven mentees and 10 senior staff to serve as potential mentors.

We set up a "Matching Event" in February 2020 where mentees spoke with each potential mentor. Mentees ranked their top five mentor choices and were paired.

We set up an orientation event, in which the following expectations were set.

- Participating mentors and mentees are expected to commit to two to four hours per month for six months.
- There will be a one-to-two-hour monthly group event covering topics ranging from resume building and writing, to professional communication.
- Mentors and mentees are expected to meet on their own at least once a month for 30 minutes.

## Current status of program

Due to the pandemic, additional events beyond the February kick-off meeting were halted. As a result, we have not completed the first cohort and cannot present outcome data at this time.

Given staffing changes and other commitments from the original mentees and mentors chosen, we re-opened the call for applications to the mentorship program in April 2021. Of 115 eligible staff, 21 applied to be mentees.

We are currently reaching out to potential mentors to determine how many we have available to pair with mentees.

## Lessons learned and next steps

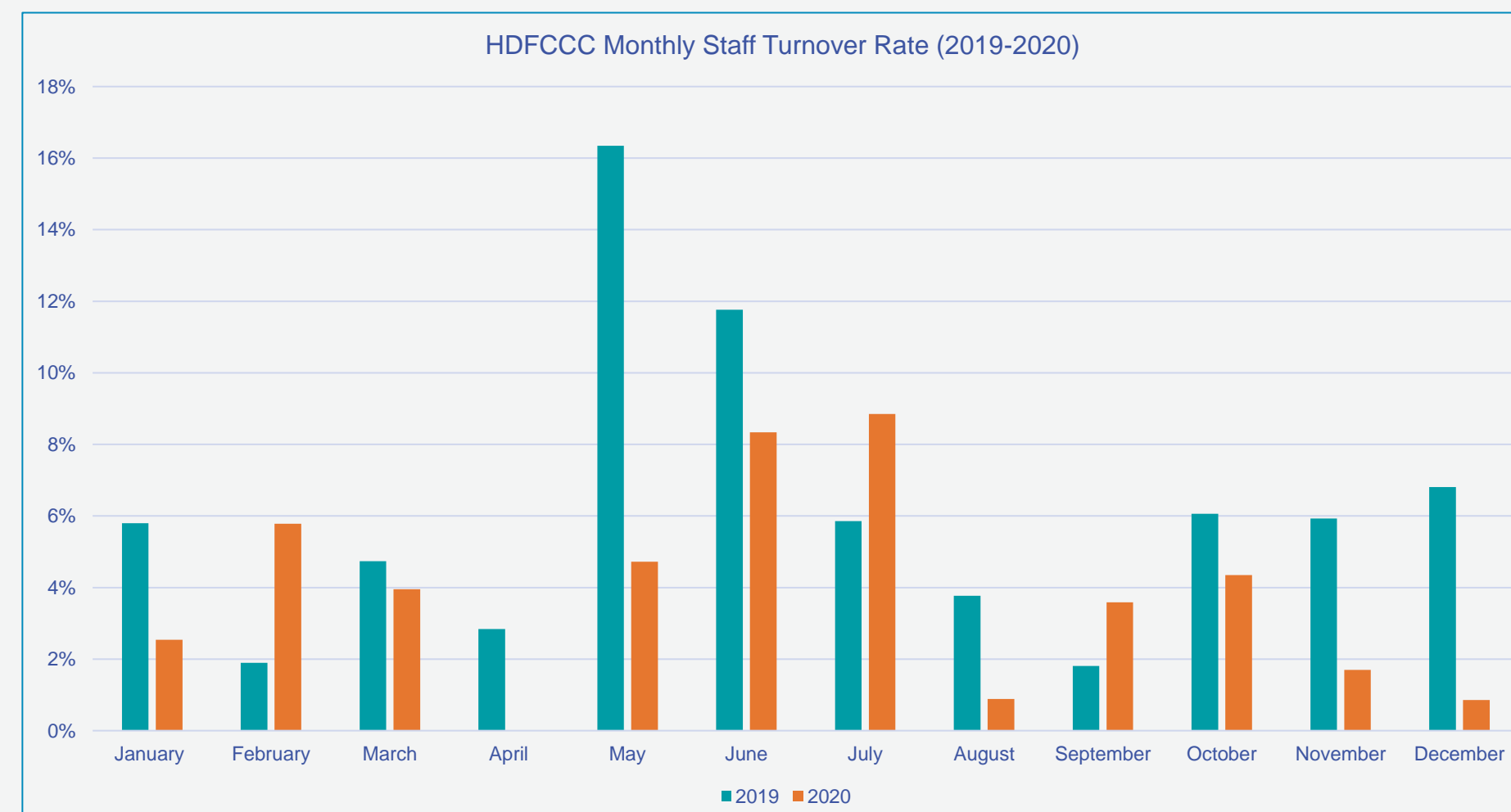
The two calls for applications yielded 25% and 18% application rates, respectively, which demonstrates interest in mentorship among staff. While no CRMs and CRSs applied during the first call for applications, 3 CRSs and 2 CRMs applied during the second call. Overall, this shows greater interest by those in more entry level roles; however, there is still interest for mentorship in a smaller subset of staff in manager roles.

### Next steps

- Develop pre and post mentorship program surveys for mentees and mentors to complete
- Select final mentees based on number of mentors
- Finalize monthly group event schedule. Some topics being considered: resume and career management document workshop, professional communication workshop, mock speed interviewing with feedback, and mentor job presentations
- Facilitate matching event between mentees and potential mentors. Mentor bios will be provided to mentees, who will set up informational meetings with mentors they are interested in working with. Mentees will provide their mentor rankings, and program coordinators will choose final pairings.
- Mentorship program will begin in early July 2021 and end in December 2021

## HDFCCC Staff Turnover

Staff turnover data for 2019 and 2020 is presented below. This data represents turnover for all assistant CRCs, CRCs, Sr. CRCs, CRSs and CRMs.



### Observations

- The highest staff turnover occur between May and July. This period aligns with staff who are leaving UCSF to attend professional and graduate school programs.
- Overall, staff turnover was higher in 2019 than 2020. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, UCSF went fully remote on March 12, 2020. As a result, fewer staff left for other jobs or school during this time.