

## **Righting the Ship: Addressing Staff Turnover**

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### **1. Background**

Like many Clinical Trials Offices (CTOs) across the country, our Sidney Kimmel Cancer Center (SKCC) CTO has been impacted by higher rates of staff turnover since the start of the 2020 COVID-19 Pandemic. The impact of turnover has led to decreased site and subject matter expertise across teams, increased the workload of staff burdened with coverage responsibilities, and decreased staff morale. A well trained and engaged clinical trials staff is essential to the success of clinical trials.

### **2. Goals**

1. Identify the factors contributing to staff turnover (survey)
2. Identify and implement correction action measures to address the factors contributing to turnover (staff retreat and follow-up)
3. Collect staff feedback on corrective action measures (survey)

### **3. Solutions and Methods**

In December 2021, the SKCC distributed a survey to identify factors contributing to increased CTO staff turnover. Following the survey, a virtual All Staff Retreat was held in January 2022 in an effort to connect with staff, discuss results of the survey, and identify corrective action measures to best address staff concerns. Following the retreat, several corrective action measures were initiated to address staff engagement (including staff training, career ladder development, team communication measures, and salary benchmarking). An interim survey to further assess staff engagement preferences was conducted in September 2022, which highlighted additional opportunities for improvement (including professional development, staff recognition, team building needs, and salaries). A CTO Engagement Committee was formed to further address staff engagement needs. A second All Staff Retreat was held in February 2023. Pre-retreat and post-retreat surveys were conducted, and dedicated monthly All Staff meetings will further address goals/opportunities identified and discussed during the 2023 All Staff Retreat.

### **4. Outcomes**

The SKCC CTO has seen a decline in staff turnover and an improvement in staff morale (as seen in HR employee retention data, as well as SKCC CTO surveys from 12/2021 and 1/2023). An increased number of staff attended the All Staff Retreat in 2023, and feedback from the surveys has shown improvement in staff morale from 2021 to 2023. Several corrective action measures remain in-progress related to career ladder benchmarking and salaries. These measures require significant time and collaboration with organizational stakeholders outside of the SKCC CTO including human resources and other non-cancer clinical research leaders.

### **5. Lessons Learned and Future Directions**

The issues impacting staff turnover, retention, and engagement are multifaceted and involve multiple institutional stakeholders. Maintaining an ongoing pulse of issues most pertinent to engagement is essential to staff retention and ultimate success of the clinical trials office in meeting individual trial goals, as well as broader institutional goals. Mid- and long-term goals include further development of onboarding and training programs, introduction of additional professional development opportunities,

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more frequent salary benchmarking, and exploration of alternative staff models to fill gaps in staffing during times of turnover.