

Bridging Units, Building Empathy: The Power of a Day-in-the-Life Program and Shadowing in the Clinical Trials Office

E. Waalkes, E. O'Donovan, M. Dureja, J. Alonso, B. Bodin, A. Joshi, J. Mehnert, B. Pothuri

Laura and Isaac Perlmutter Cancer Center at NYU Langone Health

1. Background

Clinical Trial Offices (CTOs) rely on diverse units to manage trial operations. Staff come from varied backgrounds, including clinical, regulatory, data, biospecimen collections, quality assurance, and finance, and their responsibilities are often performed independently of one another with little overlap. We aimed to improve the understanding of these cross-functional operations to optimize processes (by expanding the pool of knowledgeable contributors), while enhancing efficiency through refined communication and fostering stronger camaraderie. Beginning in 2024, the Perlmutter Cancer Center (PCC) CTO implemented a Day in the Life Program (DLP) and incorporated shadowing other units to promote cross-functional awareness and understanding of CTO operations as a whole.

2. Goals

With both the DLP and shadowing, we sought to foster a deeper understanding of each unit's duties and priorities, while cultivating greater empathy. Our goal was to achieve increased efficiency through streamlined communication between units and to enhance sensitivity to the shared mission of our CTO. We also hoped to introduce CTO members to different internal career development opportunities.

3. Solutions and Methods

The DLP was implemented during two standing CTO education sessions. Each unit was responsible for developing a multimedia introduction to their unit and responsibilities. Many opted to create video reels of what a day looks like in their respective units- this use of creative storytelling inspired by social media, made the education particularly engaging. We emphasized that one team's seemingly mundane activities are more nuanced and impactful than others may realize. In addition to the DLP, cross unit shadowing was incorporated into the orientation program for clinical staff. Existing staff across the CTO units were also encouraged to participate, after coordinating with their managers to identify an appropriate block of time. To assess the effect of these initiatives, we presented a survey about the DLP to the department with 47 percent participation (n=145) and collected testimonials from those who shadowed.

4. Outcomes

The survey conducted one year after the initiation of the DLP found that 93 percent (n=68) of respondents agreed that the program broadened their understanding of how all unit's function in the CTO. The survey also revealed that annual presentations were preferred by the majority 59 percent (38% responded bi-annually) (n=71). Additionally, the survey revealed 89 percent (n=65) of staff felt an increased sense of camaraderie. Staff who participated in the shadowing program were invited to share testimonials, recurring phrases from these experiences include: having a deeper understanding of other units, experiencing first-hand the urgency of certain tasks, understanding team communication style, and understanding downstream effects of unavoidable patient delays on other units' operations. The testimonials exemplify an understanding that our individual and collective tasks are inherently linked. Subjectively, managers have observed positive changes in follow-up communication, improved timeliness of with a greater awareness of task impact on other teams, and enhanced optimization of

existing resources. These insights highlight the program fostering empathy and enhanced efficiency and coordination.

5. Learned and Future Directions

Based on staff feedback we plan to continue the DLP annually and continue offering shadowing opportunities. We will also collect data on those who chose to pursue roles in other units of the CTO.