

## **Investment in People: Creating a Positive Culture in the MCC CTO**

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### **1. Background**

During and following the COVID-19 pandemic, staff attrition was high amongst UC San Diego Moores Cancer Center (MCC) Clinical Trials Office (CTO) staff and the depth of experience in employees decidedly low. Accrual had reduced significantly (43% drop from 2019 to 2023), study activation timelines increased to 419 days (2023), and staff turnover was 30 percent. Recognizing these vulnerabilities, newly appointed CTO leadership, armed with consultant recommendations and a mandate to make change, initiated significant, lasting improvements in five key areas which have resulted in a great “comeback story”, pointing the enterprise in a new and highly positive direction.

### **2. Goals**

The main goals of the mandate were to increase accrual and reduce time to activation through an investment in MCC CTO employees: reducing attrition, improving onboarding and ongoing education, creating a supportive and engaged culture, recognizing individual and team accomplishments, and celebrating successes. Actions emphasized positive reinforcement with rapid initiation, recognizing the need for every employee to feel included, valued, and appreciated for their contribution to the goals.

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

Solutions and Methods: Focus on Operational Details

- Retention: Partnership with Human Resources (HR) to speed employment processes, contract agency use, clear communication with employees regarding UC-wide pay structures,
- Education: Three new Trainers, standardized and centralized onboarding curriculum for new employees, evaluation of curriculum,
- Support: Professional Consultant review/assessment, process assessment, redesign of roles and responsibilities with greater differentiation and specialization resulting in an increased dispersal of tasks to teams of specialists, new Office Manager position to assign and support office environment, increased layer of Front-Line Managers for employee support,
- Recognition: CTO Newsletter highlighting new employees, recognizing “Rising Stars” with ongoing news and timely updates, Personal Rounding/Thank You’s, & expanded performance management recognition documentation,
- Celebrations: CTO Slices of Success: Pizza Pie and Progress (SOS-PPP) quarterly All-CTO celebration, Holiday Celebrations (Halloween, Winter Holidays)

### **4. Outcomes**

Outcomes: Over the last two years the MCC CTO reduced activation time by 74 percent (110 days), increased accrual by 51 percent, and reduced attrition from 30 percent to <7 percent. Current data suggests that 80 percent of employees transitioning away from their MCC CTO role are advancing their careers through admittance into programs of higher education (MD, PhD, APP paths).

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

This initiative demonstrates that strategic investment in CTO employees yields sustainable results benefiting the entire cancer center. While improved metrics provide quantifiable return on investment, the transformation in workplace culture represents the significant achievement. Key lessons include the

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importance of addressing culture as a foundation for operational improvement and empowering front-line managers as change agents. Future directions include expanding career development pathways and advanced training programs, continuing to build a sustainable culture of quality and innovation in cancer research.