Category: Clinical Trial Operations (Trial Start-up, Regulatory, Data Management, IITs) – Completed Project

From Idea to Impact: Developing the Research Science Liaison Position at Lineberger Comprehensive Cancer Center

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1. Background

Strong industry partnerships are vital for the successful expansion of clinical trial programs. However, potential Principal Investigators (PIs) may not have the bandwidth to systematically identify trials that offer cutting-edge research ideas, investigate unmet needs, and have high accrual potential for their patient population. To address these challenges, the University of North Carolina, Lineberger Comprehensive Cancer Center (LCCC) developed an innovative Research Science Liaison (RSL) position in 2023 to improve communication and workflow with industry partners.

2. Goals

The RSL position was designed for PhD-level professionals with the expertise to strategically navigate the clinical trial landscape. Serving as a point of contact for industry partners, the RSL role aims to increase the number of industry-sponsored clinical trials at LCCC. This position was envisioned as a bridge between LCCC and pharmaceutical and biotech companies, facilitating high-level scientific and medical exchanges in areas of clinical interest.

3. Solutions and Methods

The original goals of the RSL position were to:

- Bring relevant insights from the field on research developments and treatment landscapes to evaluate external collaboration opportunities with industry.
- Collect key scientific and clinical information about products in the development pipelines of potential external industry partners based upon these insights.
- Serve as a conduit for communication between LCCC and external partners to facilitate future collaborations and advocating for LCCC involvement in exciting industry research opportunities and use of LCCC translational cores in strategic partnerships.
- Be involved in key strategic thinking and provide insight into the LCCC portfolio.
- Evaluate the LCCC clinical research portfolio in collaboration with clinical operations and investigators and work with investigators to identify opportunities to bring innovative clinical trials to LCCC patients to expand the portfolio or fill existing gaps within it.
- Develop strategies to develop and promote LCCC research trials encompassing basic, clinical, and translational research.

Since its inception, RSL tasks were expanded to manage confidential disclosure agreements (CDAs) and feasibility questionnaires, giving companies a single point of contact throughout the early steps of trial selection.

4. Outcomes

Two RSLs were hired and divided their efforts across solid tumors and hematological malignancies. RSLs established internal relationships through meetings with PIs to discuss patient populations and clinical trial preferences/interests. Simultaneously, outreach to industry medical science liaisons (MSLs) developed a network within the industry community. In their first year, RSLs held 135 meetings with 66

companies. Only one company declined to meet with them. Thereafter, RSLs maintained MSL relationships through quarterly meetings and national conferences.

RSLs stay abreast of disease group needs at weekly meetings where all trials/patients are discussed. Some disease groups established monthly "portfolio meetings" with RSLs to review potential studies.

Establishment of this position correlated with a ~2.5-fold increase in industry-sponsored clinical trials across the solid tumor portfolios in 2024 compared to 2022.

5. Lessons Learned and Future Directions
The RSL position led to an increase in industry-sponsored clinical trials at LCCC. This position serves as a springboard for further engagement and collaboration with academia and industry for clinical trials.

Figure