

A Continued Investment: Growth and Expansion of the Academic Committee Mentorship Program for Oncology Trainees at the Duke Cancer Institute

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1. Background

Scientific peer review is critical for pre-Institutional Review Board (IRB) scientific oversight of cancer protocols, but this process is not broadly taught to trainees. In 2022, DCI's protocol review and monitoring committee (PRMC) and cancer research training and education coordination (CRTEC) offices addressed this unmet need and designed a PRMC Fellows Mentorship Program for rising third year medical oncology fellows. The program is now in its fourth year, rebranded as the Academic Committee Mentorship Program, expanded to other trainee groups and offers two optional distinct training electives.

2. Goals

1) Continue to mentor and train medical oncology fellows in the scientific review process; 2) Expand to other trainee groups. Give trainees the skills, training, and confidence to participate as full PRMC members; and 3) Create training electives through the PRMC Accrual Committee (Accrual Committee), Safety Oversight Committee (SOC) and DCI Monitoring Team (DCIMT).

3. Solutions and Methods

In 2022, a pilot six-month PRMC mentorship program was launched for rising third year medical oncology fellows. In year two, we expanded the program to other trainee groups, including surgical oncology, radiation oncology, pediatric hematology-oncology and junior faculty. In year three, we rebranded the program to the Academic Committee Mentorship Program and added two optional electives.

Design: Trainees attend welcome training with Lead PRMC chair, CRTEC and PRMC Staff. Trainees complete an electronic-IRB training and are paired with a PRMC medical reviewer mentor.

Mentors/mentees met before PRMC meetings to discuss assignments and conduct reviews. Following each meeting, pairs debriefed. Mentees also trained with PRMC statistician, pharmacist and patient advocate roles and attended a program mid-point meeting with Lead PRMC Chair.

In year three, we added optional electives. The Accrual Committee focuses on reviewing under accruing trials. Trainees are assigned two mentors, from the Accrual Committee and Community Outreach and Engagement (COE) office. Trainees are expected to proactively meet with their mentors, present their findings and discussion points, sharing perspectives on representation, feasibility and accrual considerations. The SOC reviews Investigator Initiated Trials (IITs) for adequate safety and conduct. Trainees are assigned two mentors, from the SOC and DCIMT to learn regulations and monitoring insights. They are expected to meet with their mentors, observe an exit interview for one trial and aid their mentor in a co-presentation.

4. Outcomes

Category: Training, Career Development, and Staff Retention – Work in Progress

In the four years since the program was launched, 22 trainees have applied and 17 were accepted. 13 trainees completed the program, and five trainees joined an academic committee post-program completion (38 percent). One program graduate is considering joining the Accrual Committee. This will increase the success percentage to 46 percent.

Overall, responses to this program are positive. One trainee wrote *“I found this experience to be the most helpful thing so far in fellowship in preparation for a career as a clinical investigator...I couldn't recommend this program highly enough to anyone interested in a career in clinical research and have recommended it to several of my co-fellows with similar career plans.”*

At the conclusion of the program, trainees are presented with a certificate of completion.

5. Lessons Learned and Future Directions

The pilot program's success allowed us to consider design changes. Presently, we are collaborating with COE to enhance trainee experience within the Accrual Committee elective.