

Improving Clinical Research Coordinator Performance Through Structured Skills-Based Training and Assessment

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1. Background

The University of Florida Health Cancer Institute (UFHCI) clinical research office (CRO) is the clinical trials arm of the Cancer Center, responsible for the development, regulatory maintenance, clinical conduct, and oversight of clinical research. In 2020, we implemented a research-specific, electronic learning management system (eLMS)-based orientation curriculum with the goal of improving overall job performance, job confidence, and staff retention. This orientation program provides comprehensive and consistent research-focused education for all new research staff but lacks the targeted development of essential role-specific job skills and standardized measurements of staff performance at the three- and six-month probationary review required for effective onboarding.

2. Goals

- Provide skill-based training specific to the functional needs of new clinical research coordinators (CRC)
- Develop and implement skills-based rubric to facilitate consistent assessment of new CRC functional development

3. Solutions and Methods

An in-person, nine-week intensive “bootcamp”-style training program specific to the CRC was developed as companion training to the existing online orientation curriculum to assist with functional skill development. The in-person, classroom style forum encouraged peer coaching and learning, and reinforced the collaborative work model practiced by clinical teams in their day-to-day practice. This training utilized the previously developed concept-based orientation, identifying and teaching the practical skills that accompany each of the six topical categories essential to the conduct of clinical research.

Training included direct instruction from subject matter experts and senior coordinating staff, data collection workshops, and peer coaching. A corresponding skills-based rubric was developed to establish expectations for demonstration of key skills for new CRCs at three, six and twelve months, to correspond with established UF Engaged staff review timepoints.

4. Outcomes

From August 2025 to present, eleven new staff members with diverse professional and educational backgrounds were hired into three separate clinical teams and onboarded using the dual eLMS-based curriculum and skills-based “bootcamp” training sessions. All staff were assessed according to the skills-based rubric with 72 percent of the initial cohort completing all training in the required period and successfully passing the probationary period by meeting expectations set forth at the three- and six-month check-in. The individuals who did not meet the six-month expectations were granted a three-month extension and individual training plans with SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, timely) goals and resource planning were developed to ensure accountability from both the staff member and manager in supporting the individuals continued development.

5. Lessons Learned and Future Directions

Establishing standardized expectations for new staff and providing improved assessment tools for onboarding managers has improved alignment among the clinical management team, supported new managers in

objectively establishing and clearly communicating expectations and goals, and improved staff and manager accountability to the onboarding process. The introduction of the skills-based rubric enables earlier identification of learning gaps, workload barriers, and support needs, facilitating proactive intervention, and has proved essential in preventing avoidable performance issues. Additional work is being done to update the e-learning concept orientation to ensure clear alignment with the skills-based training and assessment rubric, and future plans include creating similar framework for other CRO divisions, and around continued professional development for staff beyond the first year of practice to support ongoing growth and advancement-based rubric.

Figure

