

Understanding the Working Environment of Clinical Research Coordinators at the University of Florida: Key Issues and Unmet Needs

❖ Background:

Clinical Research Coordinators (CRCs) play a central role in clinical trial administration. As a comprehensive, research-oriented University in the United States, UF offers key training courses to support the work of CRCs. The UF Clinical and Translational Science Institute (CTSI) provides training and education for CRCs and other clinical personnel for the advancement of translational science.

❖ Objectives:

Increase awareness regarding the necessity of training and continuous education for CRCs.

❖ Methods:

I. The Clinical Research Coordinator at UF – Developing a White Paper

The CTSI is currently compiling a White Paper to provide CRCs with key relevant information, while also discussing future policy and regulatory initiatives that could improve the overall working environment.

II. Clinical Research Coordinator Satisfaction Survey

This survey was created using UF-licensed Qualtrics software to collect feedback regarding current training courses and issues faced in daily practice, the results of which were used as an important reference for policy development; the survey received expedited approval from the IRB, and subjects were given an anonymous link to the survey, with no personal information collected. The survey was sent to 50 CRCs currently enrolled in the UF CTSI Academy of Research Excellence (ARE) and Research Coordinators Consortium (RCC) programs.

❖ Results:

A total of 25 CRCs completed the survey. Regarding the current training situation, only 7 participants (28%) reported that they had been given sufficient formal training for all the tasks that they were required to do. In an open question about the issues faced by CRCs, 22 participants reported their views, with 12 participants indicating that training for CRCs was insufficient; most participants still sought formal training that would cover every possible situation encountered in daily work.

❖ Conclusions:

Survey results point to the necessity of additional training for CRCs at UF to support daily tasks and increase expertise. The future White Paper is expected to provide CRCs with additional information, while also raising awareness on the key issue of CRC training.

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❖ MPH Competencies strengthened by this project:

- Applying laws and regulations that protect health and ensure safety
- Informing, educating, and empowering people about health issues
- Developing policies and plans that support individual and community health efforts
- Conducting research for new insights and innovative solutions to health problems

The first two weeks of my internship experience were entirely focused on the regulatory aspect of clinical research, with a significant amount of time spent on federal policies, state policies, and UF policies. After completing the due diligence for this project, I designed an online survey and recruited a small cohort of CRCs participating in CTSI training courses to collect their feedback, following which I organized the survey results and assessed the key issues and unmet needs of practicing CRCs. From these results, I also set policy directions and recommendations that could help to improve the overall working environment.

❖ Concentration competencies strengthened by this project:

- Applying principles and methods of strategic planning in public health contexts
- Identifying, retrieving, organizing, and communicating public health information
- Demonstrating the principles of problem solving and crisis management
- Monitoring and evaluating programs for their effectiveness and quality
- Applying principles and methods of policy development/analysis to key public health issues

Several concentration competencies were strengthened during my internship: I utilized my knowledge of policy-making to compile a White Paper, which is expected to serve as a roadmap and guide for effective policies that would improve the overall working environment for CRCs. The experience of conducting a real-world survey also enhanced my data collection and analysis capabilities, while teaching me patience and contingency planning as well. In the process of confronting issues and examining the strengths and weaknesses of this project, I was also able to conduct an objective evaluation of my work, which helped me to identify the processes and procedures that I could improve upon in future projects.