

2022 NPCR VIRGINIA SUCCESS STORY

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Replenishing the Reporting Field from Within: From Partnership to Internship

National Program of Cancer Registries SUCCESS STORY

SUMMARY

The Virginia Cancer Registry (VCR) sought to support the growing need for qualified and trained Certified Tumor Registrars (CTRs) in the field while satisfying CDC grant requirements to pursue collaborative engagement opportunities with internal and external partners. Through the establishment and execution of a formal internship program, the VCR is able to receive additional help with program workload, while also better preparing candidates to sit for and pass the CTR exam on the first try and adding to the number of medical professionals capable of reporting cancer cases to accurately reflect the true burden of cancer in Virginia.

CHALLENGE

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, healthcare is the fastest-growing employment industry, and demand for Cancer Registrars is projected to grow more than 20% growth over the next three to five years. In addition to the rising caseload managed by the program, over the pandemic, statewide company lay-offs and facility downsizing impacted Virginia Cancer Registry (VCR) reporting providers, as they were still held to the same reporting standards despite decreased manpower. Additionally, during the pandemic VCR saw an uptick in requests for internships as workers were forced to rethink their career paths, from a decrease in hours or workplaces closing altogether. Although VCR staff was able to work with providers to assist with reporting difficulties as needed, with a nationwide demand for trained registrars, and a statewide deficit, the VCR took initiative to address this issue and make an impact within their scope of power.

SOLUTION

The Cancer Registry actively seeks collaborative opportunities and engagement with internal and external partners to create and foster strong connections—especially with our reporters in the field (physicians, hospitals, laboratories, etc.) Although VCR has worked with interns in the past, there has never been a formalized or structured internship program in place. Over the years VCR would receive periodic requests from people planning to sit for the CTR exam, and in need of a cancer registry where they could log their required work hours to satisfy National Cancer Registrars Association (NCRA) certification requirements.

Occasionally the registry would receive an inquiry from a student whose educational tract required a practicum to be completed with a central registry. These students found the Virginia Cancer Registry as a possible internship opportunity on a list provided by a teacher or academic advisor. Other requests came from job hunters who stumbled across cancer registry employment opportunities, and their curiosity about registry functions led them to inquire about volunteering.

Since there is a growing need for qualified and trained Certified Tumor Registrars (CTRs), and a steady increase in cancer cases reported to the registry, a partnership with interns would prove to be mutually beneficial. Developing a formalized internship program would allow the VCR to receive additional help with program caseload, accommodate the needs of those seeking internships, better prepare candidates to sit for and pass the CTR exam on the first try, and integrate interns into the workforce to add to the number of medical professionals capable of reporting cancer cases to accurately reflect the true burden of cancer in Virginia. VCR leadership began drafting plans to develop a formalized structured program with standardized procedures to be included in our program operations manual.

VCR established basic criteria for prospective intern candidates, requiring potential interns to be CTR eligible according to criteria set by the NCRA, and willing to prepare and sit for the CTR exam within 18 months. Interns work with the VCR for a period not to exceed 18 months to satisfy the 1,950 hours, equal to one year full-time, experience in the cancer registry field required to sit for the CTR exam. While affiliated with the VCR, interns are provided networking opportunities for potential employment with tumor registries throughout the state at the end of the internship period, as well as access to test-prep materials as needed. Interns are matched with a local hospital's tumor registry to get experience reporting to the registry and are paired with a registry staff mentor who will provide training specific to both CTR exam components—Cancer Registry Management and coding and abstracting.

Additionally, VCR leadership saw this new program as an opportunity to further develop its Fundamental Learning Collaborative for the Cancer Surveillance Community (FLccSC) learning management platform. Although the FLccSC portal is already loaded with learning content from beginner to advanced modules, it lacked a comprehensive framework for preparing CTR candidates to sit for the exam. Plans were quickly put in place to develop modules through internal program coursework and coordinate shared resources from other states.

RESULTS

VCR has already reaped the rewards of the program, as we had our first intern to apply for and secure a vacant CTR position within the registry and will sit for the CTR exam this fall. Filling that position was critical, as this year's Call for Data was quickly approaching. Although the registry will only on-board and house one intern at a time, the Education and Training Coordinator (ETC) will continue to field calls and inquiries from interested and eligible candidates to have a prospective candidate ready to on-board at the culmination of the prior intern's tenure. As a result of this active engagement, the registry has already on-boarded a new intern after the previous participant became the newest registry staff member.

SUSTAINING SUCCESS

As one full year of our internship program ends, VCR has found that the program has been a success on several levels. It has allowed the registry to be a better resource both Virginia citizens and interested parties. We have also been able to keep our internal staff highly proficient in their skillsets by training others, which has fostered a sense of engagement and inclusion. Additionally, VCR has been able to further develop our FLccSC learning platform and gain better insight on the capability of other internal resources and tools, such as Web Plus. But most importantly, we have been able to *all* learn and work collectively toward a common goal.

STORY QUOTE

"Success on all levels! A win for both the registry and our well-trained interns!" – John LaDouceur, VCR Education and Training Coordinator

REGISTRY CONTACT INFORMATION

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U.S. Department of
Health and Human Services
Centers for Disease
Control and Prevention