

# 2019 NPCR NORTH DAKOTA SUCCESS STORY

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## Training a CTR Intern

# NATIONAL PROGRAM OF CANCER REGISTRIES SUCCESS STORY

**SUMMARY:** Cancer registrars are data information specialists who capture complete history, diagnosis, treatment, and health status for every cancer patient in the United States. A cancer registrar's job is important because the data they collect is essential to provide information to researchers, healthcare providers, and public health officials to better monitor and advance cancer treatments, conduct research, and improve cancer prevention and screening programs. The job marketing for Cancer Registrars nationwide is demanding, and usually requires the job candidates to have specialized knowledge and professional competence needed within the cancer registry. The "Certified Tumor Registrar" (CTR) exam is a way to accredit and recognize a Cancer Registry Professional.

Before taking the CTR exam, an applicant must successfully complete specific training and fulfill certain eligibility requirements. The hands-on experience in the registry for a certain number of hours is one of the requirements. So, an internship experience at a state cancer registry can be very beneficial in many tasks for Interns / future CTRs.

In the summer of 2019, the North Dakota Statewide Cancer Registry (NDSCR) received a request from a nearby community college to take a student as an Intern. The student was in the final year study in a National Cancer Registrars Association (NCRA) accredited program and has received the necessary course content and learned essential knowledge from her college studies. After completing the paperwork required for establishing a partnership between the NDSCR and the college, the student was accepted by the NDSCR as an Intern. At the end of the two months training work at the NDSCR, the Intern gained the hands-on experience in a cancer registry environment, and fulfilled the 80 hours internship requirement, which ensured the eligibility for the student to take the CTR exam in the near future.

**CHALLENGE:** It has been 7 years since the University of North Dakota, School of Medicine and Health Sciences, Department of Pathology assumed the responsibility for the operation and maintenance of the NDSCR for the ND Department of Health. Over the past 7 years, the staff at the NDSCR did not previously host an Intern. Before taking any Intern, we need to find out:

- What is the timeframe available to both intern and our staff for completing this task?
- What teaching materials are we going to use?
- What specific clinical goals the college has for the internship?
- Are there any requirements of the UND level that we need to address, such as the requirement to sign-up an agreement between the community college and the NDSCR?
- Finally, how can we find time to make this training opportunity available, as there was insufficient CTR staff at the NDSCR?

**SOLUTION:** To the questions asked above, we were able to find the following solutions:

- **Agreement:** Since this was our first Intern, we needed to start the approval process at NDSCR from scratch. We completed an Agreement between the NDSCR and the college, specifying the responsibilities of each parties, as well as the mutual responsibilities (HIPAA, Insurance, Liability and so on).
- **Goals:** We assumed the college's program has some specific clinical goals for the internship. So, we requested the college to forward them to us to assist with setting expectations. The College Program Director then sent us the Internship Manual, which includes 160 hours study in many areas, such as the recommended assignments from NCRA, and a variety of activities in multiple domains (such as

case-finding, abstracting of tumor staging and treatment, data quality assurance, analysis and data usage, registry organization and operations . . .). It also covers basic guidelines for the future Intern, such as attendance, appearance, conduct, ethics and confidentiality, selection of practicum site and locating a clinical host site. The program Director also sent us more specific goals, specifically that 80 to 100 hours are needed for training at the NDSCR.

- **Timeframe:** The exact schedule was determined between the Intern and the NDSCR, basically between June 3rd to end of August 2019, or until the Intern finished the expected number of hours.
- **Materials:** The materials for training an Intern are very extensive and hard to absorb the relevant information in such a short period of time. Fortunately, the Intern we took was in the final year of studies in a NCRA accredited programs and has received the necessary course content and learned essential knowledge from the college study. The materials that a cancer registrar uses were familiar to the Intern, such as ICD-10, AJCC 7th Edition . . .
- **Assignments:** First, we required the Intern to become familiar with Registry Plus software that the Registry uses. The training has been focused on case abstracting. Our Education & Teaching Coordinator (ETC) selected cases for the Intern to work on (which covers the major sites) and checked on the abstracts that the Intern completed and gave feedback to the Intern the very next day. During the one-to-one training, the ETC introduced new changes in the Cancer Registry field to the Intern, including new rules and guidelines, etc. The Intern had the opportunity to observe how the NDSCR staff performs case consolidation and data linkage at the central cancer registry. The Intern also performed case finding using SEER Educate online, together with her college supervisor.
- **Staff:** The NDSCR staff was fortunate that the Intern was one of the top students in the class, and the program the Intern is attending is a NCRA accredited programs. Therefore, the Intern has received the necessary course content and gained essential knowledge from the college studies, therefore being familiar with the coding rules and guidelines. Our ETC is an expert in Cancer Registry field, who used to be a pathologist working in a big teaching hospital, as well as a CTR in the State Cancer Registry for many years.
- **Accommodations:** We provided for the Intern a computer with secure log in in a professional working environment; we also provided the Intern with a free parking permit during her working time with the NDSCR.

**RESULTS:** The NDSCR hosted an Intern needing to complete certain course requirements in order to be eligible for the CTR exam. After two-month training at the NDSCR, the Intern has applied the learned information in a practical setting, finished all of the assignments, and obtained the necessary knowledge / hours / evaluation form, which ensure the eligibility for taking the CTR exam. On the other hand, the NDSCR staff gained valuable experience to provide training opportunities for the future CTRs.

**SUSTAINING SUCCESS:** For future Intern requests, an Intern application process at the NDSCR may go more smoothly as the NDSCR has gained training experience. Therefore, the NDSCR will continue to partner with community colleges allowing students to complete internships at the NDSCR, and to provide training opportunity to the future CTRs – pending on time availability.

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