

Enhancing Communication in a Rural State to Improve Oncology Data Reporting

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SUMMARY

Cancer is the second leading cause of death behind heart disease in Arkansas. Due to the increasing burden of cancer, the Arkansas Central Cancer Registry (ACCR) continues collecting, storing, and disseminating complete and accurate cancer information for surveillance, prevention, research, investigations, and public policy endeavors.

Since its inception in 1996, ACCR has experienced fluctuating staffing changes. From having more than 20 employees at its peak, ACCR consists of only four full-time employees as of 2024. Additionally, many of ACCR's reporting facilities throughout the state experienced personnel reductions and long-lasting effects of staffing shortages because of the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, these facilities no longer had qualified or experienced oncology data specialists (ODS) to submit accurate and complete cancer cases to ACCR.

CHALLENGE

- In 2023, ACCR began offering an accredited cancer registry management training program opportunity through the American Health Information Management Association (AHIMA) in conjunction with the National Cancer Registrars Association (NCRA) practicum to state residents interested in obtaining ODS certification.
- While this effort targets increasing the ODS workforce in Arkansas, it can take as long as 2 years for individuals to complete the program and become certified. The program does not provide training to those already in the profession who need a refresher or those who need help with abstracting and coding difficult cases.
- During ACCR's quality assurance audits and follow-back processes, ACCR found that many reporting facilities were behind in cancer case reporting due to no longer having qualified staff to abstract cases.
- With the loss of knowledgeable and qualified staff, many facilities said they were unaware that they need to report cancer cases to the state central cancer registry.
- ACCR's completion rates were low. Reporting facilities often asked for guidance. The inquiries and need for training strained ACCR's already overtaxed staff.

SOLUTION

The ACCR director contracted with Registry Partners, Inc. to fill the role of education training coordinator. Through this collaboration, ACCR was able to produce a newsletter, provide trainings, and set office hours for reporters. The new monthly educational newsletter provides abstracting and quality improvement tips along with relevant ACCR rules, updates, and submission deadline reminders. ACCR also offers at least six webinars to state facilities each year. The webinars are accredited by NCRA as continuing education credits. The monthly office hours, started in October 2024, provide an opportunity for facilities to speak directly to ACCR's team of ODS-C, IT specialists, and its director.

RESULTS

Since implementing its new educational newsletter, ACCR has seen improvements in cancer case reporting. Its completeness rates for 2022 cancer diagnoses increased from 81.9% in February 2024 to 101.48% in November 2024. Completeness rates for 2023 cancer diagnoses also improved from 80.4% in August 2024 to 86.11% in November 2024.

The ACCR Virtual Office hour has been a huge success with facility reporters. Facility abstractors can share their screens with ACCR, giving ACCR the opportunity to pinpoint where edit errors are occurring. Being able to work through issues in real time has helped facilities avoid similar failing edits.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

ACCR's director hopes to continue expanding and improving its education and training program in the years to come. One of her goals is to offer in-person or live virtual trainings to facilities experiencing reporting errors. The trainings will include a walk-through of ACCR's software and reporting applications, an overview of reporting requirements, and a demonstration on how to enter accurate abstracts. Each facility placed on a training plan will be monitored, and follow-up trainings will be provided for areas that need improvement.



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