

Partnering with a Local College to Create an Internship for Cancer Registry Management Student

AUTHORS: Chris Bushaw, MEd, RHIT, ODS-C and Jennifer Nelson, ODS-C

SUMMARY

In response to the shortage of oncology data specialists (ODS), the Minnesota Cancer Reporting System (MCRS) developed a training internship for cancer registry management (CRM) students. It provides hands-on experience in applying students' knowledge from coursework and to help prepare them for the national ODS exam.

MCRS established a partnership with Rochester Community and Technical College's (RCTC) CRM Program and signed a 5-year agreement. To be eligible for the internship, the student must have completed courses in the CRM Associate of Applied Science degree or Certificate Program at RCTC. MCRS training materials included a casefinding assignment, presentations, practice abstracts to be completed in SEER*Abs software (the National Cancer Institute's Abstracting Tool), and case consolidation tasks. Training was virtual and consisted of independent study assignments, one-on-one meetings with MCRS trainers, weekly staff meetings, monthly staff educational meetings, as well as completing the National Cancer Registrars Association's (NCRA's) 5 core competencies. In the future, MCRS would like to evaluate specific aspects of the internship program and investigate the possibility of evaluating a student's results in SEER Educate to address problem areas.

CHALLENGES

- Addressing shortage of oncology data specialists.
- Adding internship training responsibilities to MCRS staff's full workloads.
- Identifying an opportunity to partner with an accredited CRM program.
- Obtaining agreement between two government entities delayed the start of internship program.

SOLUTIONS

MCRS Field Services staff:

- Agreed that the internship program would be beneficial to MCRS and the ODS profession.
- Collaborated with RCTC to develop and sign a 5-year agreement to partner in an internship for CRM students.
- Created a practicum based on the NCRA's 5 core competencies with additional activities and assignments, some specifically targeted to a central cancer registry.
- Worked with the CRM program director at RCTC to identify students who were eligible for the internship program.

RESULTS

- From February to May 2024, the intern completed 160 hours, including NCRA's 5 core competencies and other activities provided by MCRS, ensuring her eligibility to sit for the ODS exam.
- Training was 100% virtual and self-paced. We met with the student 1 to 3 times per week.
- The student also met with our research scientist, biostatistician, and data management staff to gain insight on their duties.
- MDS trainers gained experience in training students, which can be used for future training of internship students and new hires.
- The first intern passed the ODS exam in August 2024 and was hired in a hospital cancer registry in October 2024.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

- After completion of the first internship training session, it was confirmed the time commitment was manageable and worth the effort.
- MCRS will continue to work with RCTC to provide internship opportunities for eligible students.
- MCRS will implement a detailed evaluation form on specific areas of our program.
- MCRS will investigate the possibility of access to students' results in SEER Educate (a free online training platform for cancer registry professionals to improve coding skills and earn CE credits) so their performance can be evaluated, and problem areas addressed.
- MCRS will explore the feasibility of providing interns with a virtual desktop using MDH's virtual private network. This will allow students to access MCRS' abstracting software and test database.
- The intern's feedback was positive: "It was a fantastic experience. It was evident that a lot of time and effort was put into the activities as well as ensuring the practicum objectives were met. The flexibility to work at your own pace was ideal. This experience truly reinforced the understanding of the central registry functions that were learned about from reading the cancer registry management book." – L. K.