2020 NPCR SOUTH CAROLINA CENTRAL CANCER REGISTRY SUCCESS STORY

STORY TOPIC: Assisting Facilities with Cancer Reporting Due to Staff Shortages from COVID-19-related Barriers

STORY CATEGORY: Public Health Impact

STORY TITLE: Cancer Reporting During COVID-19: Still in This Together

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SUMMARY

The South Carolina Central Cancer Registry (SCCCR) partnered with its parent agency, the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control (SC DHEC) and a cancer registry data collection vendor (vendor) to assist registry and non-registry cancer reporting facilities with data collection and submission because of barriers facilities were experiencing due to COVID-19.

CHALLENGE

Cancer reporting has become less of a priority for many facilities due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Reporting facilities in South Carolina (SC) are experiencing cancer reporting delays and non-reporting due to the current issues associated with the COVID-19. Several registry and non-registry hospitals, and other reporting facilities such as cancer treatment centers and urology groups are short-staffed due the COVID-19 pandemic. Staff continue to endure furloughs, reduction in hours, salary decreases, reassignment of duties, and even dismissal. These barriers to "normal" operations and reporting result in a chain reaction of delayed reporting and threaten timeliness and completeness for not only these reporting facilities, but for the state cancer registry as well.

SOLUTION

The state of SC health department was awarded several million dollars in funds to battle the COVID-19 pandemic within the state. SC DHEC staff were asked to submit proposals with justification to higher-level decision-makers in order to receive assistance with barriers associated with the pandemic. Because the SCCCR cannot successfully fulfill its public health obligations without the assistance of entities who report cancer within the state, temporarily providing assistance our partners in cancer reporting is logical approach to providing a solution to current barriers that keep them from fulfilling their own public health obligation. SCCCR staff worked with the Bureau of Public Health within SC DHEC to get approval to rapid-hire additional Certified Tumor Registrars (CTRs) using additional state funding.

RESULTS

The SCCCR was approved to hire four new CTRs, however, since it can be difficult to find qualified personnel with the CTR credential, we were only able to hire one full-time CTR (all other applicants were not qualified). However, this one hire has been extremely vital to current data collection efforts to assist facilities with timely and quality cancer reporting. In addition, the SCCCR was able to use state funding to pay for an outside vendor to assist facilities with their workload because they were not able to hire more CTRs.

SCCCR staff communicated daily and weekly with SC facilities to access who was having difficulties due to issues related to COVID-19. This gave us an opportunity to think outside the box. SCCCR staff assessed, prioritized, and reprioritized as reporting "situations" appeared and were resolved. We pooled our available staff, vendor, and new-hire CTR and set-up remote access to facilities needing help and utilized WebPlus for securely abstracting and transferring or sharing documents and data.

SCCCR staff identified the appropriate information technology (IT) resources for each SC facility to establish the necessary remote access to all systems and applications to review the medical records and complete the case abstracting. The process also required a set of clear and concise instructions for users to be able to log into the applications. The best approach was to setup a call with each user and use screen sharing to walk users through the access process and work through any technical difficulties with the facility IT resource. The coordination between SCCCR staff, the vendor, and the facility IT resource made these efforts productive and efficient.

Through this collaboration, the SCCCR was able to assist two hospitals, one free-standing treatment center, and one urology group in reviewing over 2000 potential cases and abstracting 1205 newly diagnosed 2018 cancer cases.

SUSTAINING SUCCESS

The key to sustaining success in the future is many-fold. Good communication between the central registry and both internal and external stakeholders is essential. We continue to inform internal stakeholders on our achievements and needs and work with them to find solutions. We continue to communicate regularly with all facilities who report cancer in SC to assess their reporting status, barriers, and needs, so that we can determine how best the central registry can contribute to their success.

Having clear protocols for remote access of facilities provides the opportunity to sustain support for those facilities that have a backlog or need help in the future. The SCCCR will maintain the established remote accesses and add remote access to additional facilities to increase the ability to collect data efficiently and in a timely manner.

Having staff onboard who care about and understand operations cannot be understated. Our dedicated and knowledgeable staff were instrumental in the success of these efforts. The challenges over the past year will contribute to our long-term success. We are working as a team more than ever, learning and sharing skills and expertise. We have learned to be more flexible and more selfless, all working towards the same goals in cancer surveillance.

REGISTRY CONTACT INFORMATION

South Carolina Central Cancer Registry
803-898-8000/0107, https://scdhec.gov/CancerRegistry