

2020 NPCR ARIZONA CANCER REGISTRY SUCCESS STORY

STORY TOPIC: Collaborative partnerships/projects

STORY CATEGORY: Public Health Impact

STORY TITLE: Arizona Cancer Registry Develops Student Internship Program

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SUMMARY

The current lack of qualified cancer registrars in the state of Arizona is troubling. With many registrars in the state approaching the age of retirement, attention needs to turn to training the next generation of registrars for our state to ensure that we can continue to collect quality data.

As a group, Health Information Management (HIM) students present a pool of worthy candidates for cancer registry work. But, how do we best introduce these students to cancer registry practices to garner interest in the profession and train them on core concepts? The Arizona Cancer Registry (ACR) designed a student internship program and successfully hosted our first college student intern from the HIM program from a local college.

CHALLENGE

There is a known shortage of cancer registrars within the state of Arizona, and tapping into local HIM programs to find students who may be interested in the profession is crucial to the continued development of new registrars, as the education and experience they gain while on their HIM educational path prepares them for a transition into cancer registry work. However, for these students to be successful, they need to be exposed to a large amount of information in a relatively short amount of time. Thus, a concise training program needs to be developed and implemented to encompass those concepts in a format they can easily absorb and understand.

The cancer registry profession is not a widely covered topic in Arizona HIM educational programs. Additionally, when a student is interested in learning more about cancer registry work, placement within a hospital registry setting for their professional work experience is often difficult, due to the lack of available registry staff to supervise and monitor the student for the full duration required. Hospital registries in the state of Arizona that can house a student for the entire duration of their professional work experience are few and far between. Usually, if a student is placed with a hospital that has a registry, they may shadow a registrar to briefly discuss their daily responsibilities, but they are not provided with an opportunity for an in-depth look at the work the registrar does, the materials they use, or the broader concepts the registrar applies to their daily work.

SOLUTION

Historically, the ACR has partnered with a local community college, Phoenix College, by offering to present yearly to HIM program student cohorts about cancer registry work. Beginning in 2019, the ACR decided to take that collaboration even further by reaching out to Phoenix College to host a HIM program student for 75 hours of professional work experience. The development of the ACR's internship program took several months, and involved the ACR using guidelines and requirements provided by both the Arizona Department of Health Services and Phoenix College to design a professional work experience that included three general sections: training, daily activities, and a student project.

- Training included information about central registries, hospital registries, basic cancer-coding principles, and procedures and systems specific to the ACR. The student was assigned reading from the various national manuals/guidelines used in the cancer registry. The student also completed a selected number of SEER online modules to reinforce what they read, as well as coding exercises.
- Daily activities included being given an opportunity to meet and shadow all ACR staff, including our Operations Section, Epidemiologist, Data Analyst, QA Manager, Training & Policy Manager, and Office Chief. They also attended ACR huddles, department meetings, and NAACCR webinars, which provided them with an opportunity to network with hospital registrars also in attendance.
- The student project was designed to give the Phoenix College student exposure to using a central registry database and to the ACR's internal processes in our Operations Section. The ACR provided the student with a clear project outline and requirements for completion. The student worked independently, under the general supervision of the Training & Policy Manager, as well as the Operations Manager, as needed.

Once assigned by Phoenix College, the student made initial contact with the ACR to determine a schedule. A customized training plan that included the general sections above was then further developed and implemented. The student was encouraged to provide feedback on the overall process to the ACR and Phoenix College.

RESULTS

At the end of their professional work experience, the student gave a presentation to both the ACR and their program cohort summarizing their time spent at the ACR, what they learned, and their project. They also completed an evaluation of their experience at the ACR that was submitted to Phoenix College.

The overall goal of the student's project was to not only give the student exposure to a central cancer registry's daily work and procedures, but also to assist our registry in piloting a new process before it was adopted for use by the ACR's Operations Section. As a result of the student's project, the Operations Section received valuable feedback that impacted the final procedure and how it was implemented within the agency.

Additionally, further benefit came as a result of the student presenting to their fellow classmates; Phoenix College had several students request for their next internship opportunity

to be with the ACR after hearing about the student's positive experience with the central registry. The ACR also ultimately hired the student into a position within our agency.

The success of the internship program is encouraging; the ACR plans to continue our partnership with Phoenix College by presenting on the topic of cancer registry to their HIM students, as well as by continuing to host Phoenix College students for their professional work experience.

SUSTAINING SUCCESS

The ACR is excited to expand the exposure of the cancer registry profession in the college setting. We hope that by continuing to showcase cancer registry to HIM students, we can help to spark interest in the field, support health information professionals, and contribute to the success of potential future registrars in the state of Arizona. We plan to continue our student internship program and to offer professional work experience to Phoenix College HIM students who wish to learn more about the cancer registry.

REGISTRY CONTACT INFORMATION

ACR Main Phone: 602-542-7320

ACR Website: <https://azdhs.gov/preparedness/public-health-statistics/cancer-registry/index.php>