



# A Nursing Workforce Program to Advance Knowledge and Skills for Nurses Implementing Cancer Clinical Research

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Clinical nursing research is an emerging subspecialty that enhances nursing expertise. In an effort to provide a basic educational curriculum on cancer research and clinical trials, a major academic cancer center launched a novel program titled Clinical Research Nursing Grand Rounds that allowed nurses to receive continuing education units. The purpose of the current article is to describe the development and content of the education model, challenges encountered, and implications for oncology nursing education, practice, and research.

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Clinical nursing research, an emerging subspecialty, is challenging to understand without the appropriate knowledge, skills, and education. The National Institutes of Health ([NIH], 2011) and other healthcare organizations recognize that patient safety, study integrity, and nursing expertise in clinical research are enhanced with appropriate education and training.

## Nurses' Role in Oncology Clinical Trials

As the complexity and diversity of cancer treatment and prevention trials continue to steadily increase, the demand for nurses to be well educated in the emerging subspecialty of oncology clinical trials grows. Many professional organizations have launched comprehensive initiatives to define the scope and practice of this nursing specialty (Daugherty, Schmie-

der, Good, Leos, & Weiss, 2010; NIH, 2011; ONS, 1998). The standard template consisted of definitions of the scope and practice, explanations of the core competencies, and discussion of the overall protection of study participants, management of study protocols, integrity of data, and adherence to regulatory guidelines.

In the current article, the focus is on definitions and core competencies that include the fundamental knowledge, skills, and expertise required to proficiently (a) identify and care for participants in clinical trials with a past, current, or potential diagnosis of cancer, (b) manage oncology clinical trials in diverse settings, (c) ensure protection of subjects enrolled in clinical trials, and (d) ensure that scientific integrity is maintained through data reliability and strict adherence to regulatory mandates (Daugherty et al., 2010). Those core competencies also are maintained by

clinical research coordinators. Previously, clinical research coordinators were RNs; however, the limited availability of academic or professional education programs, the increasing shortage of nurses in the workforce, and the reluctance of nurses willing to work in research have led to an increase in other allied health professionals filling that role. The growing trend to use professionals who are not nurses in that role has led to a lack of RNs in the study's implementation in some outpatient settings. The confluence of these trends increases the need for nurses in all clinical settings to better understand the complexity of clinical research development, implementation, and maintenance.

## Developing the Module

The development, implementation, and evaluation of the current pilot effort were conducted in three steps: establishing the need, developing the content and applying for Oncology Nursing Society (ONS) credit, and evaluating the outcomes.

### Establishing the Need

A baseline survey was distributed to all nurses at Roswell Park Cancer Institute to determine if nurses expressed a need for educational programs related to clinical research and its application. The nurses' feedback indicated an interest existed in obtaining additional education on clinical research. Nurses identified specific topics that included implementation of a clinical research study, the role of the nurse and the clinical research coordinator, and documentation procedures for documenting and tracking patient participation in clinical trials.