MAHCP Career Profile

Clinical Trials Coordinator

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The Clinical Trials Coordinator is like the deputy sheriff in an old western movie: responsible for posting rewards, rounding up the suspects, giving them a number, studying their behavior and completing all the paperwork. Only in this case it is the paperwork that is locked up for 25 years – not the suspect!

The primary role of a Clinical Trial Coordinator is to ensure that all studies are ethically sound and to make certain the study complies with the codes approved by the World Health Organization, the guidelines of Health Canada and the protocols of the UManitoba Research Ethics Board. "The rights, safety, and well-being of patients are to prevail over science". Ethics is a very strong component of clinical research and is the direct responsibility of the Clinical Trials Coordinator.

At a practical level this means ensuring that all patients are suitable for the study; that each patient has a thorough understanding of the study and their individual role; and that each patient willingly consents to participate.....Then the paperwork begins and binders become your best friends! All study documentation must be recorded, organized, and stored to allow accurate reporting, interpretation, verification, and statistical analysis. This requires someone who is highly organized, detailed-oriented and has the ability to effectively and efficiently handle multiple tasks.

Career opportunities for Clinical Trial Coordinators, Research Assistants and Clinical Research Associates are found in almost all areas of hospitals and large clinics. The individuals hired for these positions may have backgrounds as varied as the departments hiring. Experience, skill or education requirements range from administrative, business, science and technology degrees to practical knowledge and ability skill sets. The requirements for a clinical trial recruiting patients to determine the effects of a drug will differ from those of a department studying tissue samples to determine the effects of temperature. Both of these studies require strong documentation and observational skill, but the patient trial requires a strong background in medical history intake and medical terminology; whereas, the tissue study requires a strong knowledge of pathology, biology, microbiology or related fields. These background levels of expertise and knowledge can become the basis for obtaining a Clinical Research certificate.

There are two organizations that provide certification for Clinical Trial Coordinators: ACRP - Association of Clinical Research Professionals (www.arcpnet.org) and SoCRA – Society of Clinical Research Associates (www.socra.org). These are courses of study with exams set several times a year throughout North America. Red River previously ran a two year evening program resulting in a Clinical Research Certificate. Additional knowledge of statistics and ethics is an advantage. Ethics rounds (province wide links) are held monthly and ethics courses are available at UManitoba, UWinnipeg and UBrandon.

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A quick Google of clinicaltrials.gov and Manitoba will result in a list of 894 (262 recruiting) patient studies taking place in Manitoba. This list does not include technical or equipment studies. In North America it is estimated that Clinical Trial Coordinator positions will increase by 20% over the next ten years.

While many coordinators work outside their department, I am fortunate to work as a member of the PET/CT Imaging team in Nuclear Medicine at the Health Sciences Centre. Since the inception of the PET/CT program, employment opportunities have opened for additional Nuclear Medicine technologists in the areas of general nuclear medicine, radiopharmacy, radiochemistry, and radiochemistry engineering.

So back to the old western movie....

The Clinical Trial Coordinator (aka deputy sheriff) ensures ....that everyone wears a white hat and does the right thing.... that every detail is written down – or it didn't happen.....that the endless paperwork is completed in a timely manner..... that everyone's confidentiality is respected.....and that any regulatory body (the judge) would not find fault with the research study for the next 25 years.