Human Resources: A Fact Sheet on Certified Tumor Registrars (CTR)

What is a cancer registry?

A cancer registry is a clinical information system designed for the collection, management, and analysis of data on persons with the diagnosis of a malignant (cancer) or neoplastic disease. Cancer registries can be classified into three general types:

- Health care institution registries maintain data on all patients diagnosed and/or treated for cancer at their facility. Health care facilities report cancer cases to the central or state cancer registry as required by law.
- Central registries are population-based registries that maintain data on all cancer patients within certain geographical areas.
- Special purpose registries maintain data on specific types of cancer, such as brain tumors.

Why maintain a cancer registry?

Maintaining a cancer registry ensures that health officials have accurate and timely information, while ensuring the availability of data for treatment, research, and educational purposes:

- Local, state, and national cancer agencies use registry data in defined areas to make important public health decisions that maximize the effectiveness of limited public health funds, such as the placement of screening programs.
- Cancer registries are valuable research tools for those interested in the etiology, diagnosis, and treatment of cancer.
- Fundamental research on the epidemiology of cancer is initiated using the accumulated data.
- Lifetime follow-up is an important aspect of the cancer registry. Current patient follow-up serves as a reminder to physicians and patients to schedule regular clinical examinations and provides accurate survival information.

Public health and medical providers utilize these data in a wide variety of ways. Specifically, they are used to:

- Evaluate patient outcome and quality-of-life concerns in order to implement procedures for quality improvement.
- Provide follow-up information for cancer surveillance.
- Calculate survival rates by utilizing various data items and factors.
- Provide information for cancer program activities.
- Analyze referral patterns.
- Allocate resources at the health care facility, the community, regional or state level.
- Develop educational programs for health care providers, patients, and the public.
- Report cancer incidence as required under state law.
- Evaluate efficacy of treatment modalities.

What is a cancer registrar?

Cancer registrars are data management experts who collect clinical information about cancer patients and maintain a clinical database of cancer statistics for various healthcare agencies. Cancer registrars also work closely with physicians, administrators, researchers, and health care planners to provide core support for cancer program development, ensure compliance of quality and reporting standards, and serve as a valuable resource on cancer informatics with the goal of preventing and controlling cancer.

What is the Certified Tumor Registrar (CTR) credential?

The Certified Tumor Registrar credential demonstrates a requisite knowledge and professional competence needed within the cancer registry. It is nationally recognized in the recruitment and retention of registry personnel. NCRA's certification board—the Council on Certification—develops and administers the CTR exam. Over 5,000 individuals in the U.S. and internationally have attained the CTR credential. Hospitals accredited by the Commission on Cancer require all case abstracting be performed by a CTR. Some states require a CTR to manage cancer case reporting.
How does one earn and maintain the CTR credential?

There are eligibility requirements that must be met to sit for the CTR exam, including academic coursework and a clinical practicum or having cancer registry experience. Once met, candidates can take the exam during three, three-week long testing periods. The current CTR Exam is composed of one-hundred eighty (180), multiple-choice test items, based on seven Domains of Practice, including Abstracting/Coding, Analysis and Data Usage, Cancer Program Accreditations, Casefinding, Data Quality Assurance, Follow-up, and Registry Organization and Operations. Candidates receiving a passing score are entitled to use “CTR” after their name. To maintain a certified status, a credentialed professional must complete 20 hours of continuing education credits every two years. For more information on the CTR credential, go to www.ctrexam.org, e-mail ctrexam@ncra-usa.org, or call 703-299-6640 Ext. 312.

Cancer Registrar and CTR Compensation Information

NCRA’s publication entitled Salary Considerations for Cancer Registrars: 2017 provides human resource departments with accurate and timely salary information to assist with hiring of this critical health information professional. To download the survey, go to: www.ncra-usa.org/Workforce/Salary-Considerations.

New Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) Code for the 2020 Census

The National Cancer Registrars Association (NCRA) led the advocacy efforts to establish a new Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) for medical registrars. The new code of “Health Information Technologists and Medical Registrars - 29-9021” recognizes the distinct skills and responsibilities of the medical registry profession and will ensure salary statistics on the cancer registry workforce from the 2020 census will be comprehensive and accurate.

The new SOC classification for Cancer Registrars is 29-9021: Health Information Technologists and Medical Registrars. The definition is:

“Apply knowledge of healthcare and information systems to assist in the design, development, and continued modification and analysis of computerized healthcare systems. Abstract, collect, and analyze treatment and follow-up information of patients. May educate staff and assist in problem solving to promote the implementation of the healthcare information system. May design, develop, test, and implement databases with complete history, diagnosis, treatment, and health status to help monitor diseases.”

Illustrative examples: Cancer Registrar, Health Informatics Specialist, Health Information Analyst