

SPOTLIGHT ON DENISE FRIESEMA, MS, RN, OCN®

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Denise Friesema has been nominated for Coordinator Elect for our SIG. Elections will be in January, 2009. At this time she is unopposed in the election. Please get to know Denise through this spotlight.

Denise Friesema is the Director of Clinical Research Operations, Section of Hematology/Oncology at the University of Chicago Medical Center. She received both her BSN (1995) and her MS (2007) from Purdue University, and her OCN® certification in 2002. Denise has spent her nursing career in oncology nursing. Her first position was as a staff nurse on an autologous bone marrow transplant unit at the University of Chicago, followed by two years as a research nurse associate working with participants in breast cancer trials. She assumed the position of nurse manager in 1999. As she assumed broader administrative and financial responsibility in addition to oversight of data management and clinical trial contracting, she was appointed to her present director position. Denise is responsible for the administrative, financial and operational components of the entire clinical research enterprise. This group includes 72 employees, 45 clinical faculty and 22 fellows. “This work experience as a research nurse and director along with my advanced education has prepared me to think critically about the fundamental role and challenges of the clinical trials nurse.”

Day to day responsibilities include directing and supervising research nurses, physician resource nurses, clinical research associates, research phlebotomists and mid-level practitioners involved in both clinical trials and clinical care. She prepares strategic plans for the growth of clinical research, develops standard operating procedures, and interfaces with the pharmaceutical industry regarding administrative and regulatory policy and research contracts. Denise’s position also involves facilitating the University of Chicago Medical Center’s Phase II Consortium of 14 affiliate institutions.

A very busy professional, Denise has found time to be involved with ONS in many capacities. She has been an ONS Leadership Development Institute Fellow, a Chemotherapy Trainer, served on an ONCC OCN® Passing Score Task Force, and contributed as an Oncology Nursing Forum Review Board member. Denise has served as a Genentech Regional Nurse Advocate for eight years. In addition, she has served on the University of Chicago IRB, as a member of the Clinical Trials Review Committee and a member of the Chemotherapy Performance Improvement Team.

Denise remains passionate about clinical trials and the unique treatment options they afford patients. She has seen cancer treatment evolve in several tumor types, especially the development of targeted therapies which have allowed patients to live longer and better.

Achieving a better work-life balance is one thing Denise would like to change about her own life, as well as the lives of her staff. Given the demands of her job, her family sometimes takes a lower priority than she would like. “I think many nurses struggle with this and it’s important that we keep balance so we don’t burnout and leave the passion which brought each of us to nursing in the first place.” As a leader in her institution, she feels it is important to be sensitive to the challenges her colleagues face, and to create and collaborate on solutions to maintain balance.

The current political and economic environments hold many challenges for clinical trial nurses (CTNs). Denise believes that recruitment and retention and professional development of CTNs, as well as funding of clinical trial research are particular challenges. With the nursing shortage, attracting and retaining nurses to this specialty continues to be difficult. Although CTNs are critical to the conduct of research, the nursing shortage has resulted in a shift to dependence on unlicensed personnel managing clinical trials in some institutions. Professional development of CTNs must continue to be a high priority for the CTN SIG. Nurses need to have a thorough understanding of the regulations (OHRP, FDA, etc) governing clinical research. As funds for clinical research continue to fall short of the need, access to clinical trials declines and contributes to low participation. CTNs must be politically aware, petitioning legislators to provide funding and resources for cancer research.

In the immediate future, Denise believes the CTN SIG needs to continue to focus on professional development opportunities. How to attract and retain nurses to this unique specialty is part of this focus. Developing tools to assist hospitals and private practices in resource allocation is another challenge. Proper resource allocation will lead to nurse retention. CTNs are in a unique position to conduct nursing research, evidence-based practice projects and to generate publications. Another goal of the SIG could be to encourage and facilitate such activities. Given the government funding challenges, nurses must think critically about how to effectively and efficiently run a clinical research program. The SIG needs to be involved in lobbying Congress. The goal of making cancer a chronic condition can only be achieved with adequate funding for research.

In addition to her very busy professional life, Denise and her husband, Jamie, manage a busy household. They celebrated their 7th anniversary November 24th with their two children, Alex who is 3 1/2 and Kiera who is 1 year 3 months. When Denise is not at work, she enjoys reading to Alex and Kiera, and loves to shop! They are also a family of avid campers; from May to October they can be found in the great outdoors most weekends.