SIGNIFICANCE and BACKGROUND

In 1999, the governments of the United States, the Republic of Ireland, and Northern Ireland established the All Ireland/National Cancer Institute Cancer Consortium (NCICC) with the purpose of progressing the cancer research agenda on the island of Ireland. As part of the infrastructure of the consortium, a Nurses Working Group (NWG) was established to facilitate and assist in implementing collaborative educational opportunities for nurses. Working group members from All Ireland and the NCI made recommendations in the following areas:

- improve the scope of cancer care and clinical trials
- provide continuing education activities through video conferencing
- promote consortium activities through an established web-site and newsletter
- plan future activities including nursing research and dissemination through presentations and publications.

As clinical trials became more prevalent on the island of Ireland, health care leaders identified that increased training was needed for nurses who coordinate or care for participants on clinical trials. Therefore, one of the initial actions of the NWG was to plan a clinical trials training program for oncology nurses from the island of Ireland in partnership with the National Cancer Institute, and the Clinical Center, National Institutes of Health.

CLINICAL TRIAL TRAINING (CTT) PROGRAM

The first program began in 2002. The NCI NWG consists of 3 nurses with oncology, clinical trial and education expertise. This core group assisted in developing the curriculum and ensured consistency with the overall goals of the NWG and attendees objectives. NCI NWG members also selected the preceptors from either the oncology units at the Clinical Center or from the Center for Cancer Research, NCI’s intramural research program. Criteria for selection was based on years of experience in oncology nursing or expertise in clinical research taking into account the disease areas where the Consortium nurses were working. Nurses from both jurisdictions, Northern Ireland (NI) and the Republic of Ireland (RoI) were chosen by leadership from their respective countries.

The curriculum evolved over time to accommodate new experiences to meet the overall program objectives as well as meeting the attendees’ objectives. The initial program was 3 months duration but as the experience in clinical trials has increased on the Island, the duration is now 5 weeks.

**General**

- Tour and overview of the NIH and NCI
- Overview of the NCI/All Ireland Consortium
- Library tour
- Dedicated time in library/PubMed
- Attend Center for Cancer Research (CCR) continuing education sessions (Brown Bag Lunch, Nursing Grand Rounds, Abstract writing, Journal Club, etc.)
- Time with Genetics research nurse/genetics clinic

**Learning more about the NCI**

- Meeting with staff from NCI’s Office of Cancer Communication
- Meeting with nurses from the NCI’s Division of Cancer Prevention
- Meeting with staff from NCI’s Office of Cancer Complementary and Alternative Medicine

**Research specific**

- 11 on-line self-learning clinical trial modules (in lieu of research course offered the first few years of the Program)
- Preceptor experience (assigned based on interest and current position)
- Protocol development exercise/analysis
- Attend an IRB meeting with post-meeting discussion
- Attend part of the NIH Research Ethics course
- CTEP workshop
- Nursing research: meeting with nurse scientist (NINR and/or CC)
- Role of advanced practice nurse in Clinical Trials Informatics and Clinical Trials
- Clinical Data Management at the CCR
- Patient recruitment: meeting with CCR outreach coordinator
- Developing clinical trial SOPs: meeting with CCR QA Officer
- Spend 1 week at an NCI-designated cancer center, Lombardi Cancer Center in Washington, DC (new in 2010)

Research participants (n=15), their managers (n=8) and the programme leaders (n=3) using survey, focus groups and interviews as well as evaluation and discussion. The NWG will continue to promote activities and advance knowledge through newsletter, website, telesynergy activities, and publications.

SUMMARY

Between 2002-2010, 20 nurses from the Rol and NI have visited the NCI to attend workshops and seminars on conducting clinical trials.

- 9 nurses from Northern Ireland
- 11 nurses from Republic of Ireland

Immediate post-program evaluations have been extremely positive. All curriculum activities have been rated either a 4 or 5 (based on a 5-point Likert scale).

- “The NCI is a great place to witness and really understand the bench to bedside approach. The experience also supports staff in developing leadership and confidence. Nurses are being asked to share their work nationally.”
  - Ruth Boyd-Belfast City Hospital

- The NCI was as much for me a life experience as a professional one-people opened their hearts, their minds and their homes to us.”
  - Eileen Hanley-Cork University Hospital

- "It was a great experience and provided me with skills I have continued to use in the workplace" - Naomi Hill-Belfast City Hospital

EVALUATION & DISCUSSION

In 2008, the NWG conducted an evaluation of the 6 years of the programme. Data was collected from a range of stakeholders – the CTT participants (n=15), their managers (n=8) and the programme leaders (n=3) using survey, focus groups and interviews as well as existing post-programme evaluations. Findings showed an overall outstandingly positive evaluation for the NCIC/Ireland CTT programme. The programme is highly valued by both participants and their managers and in some cases has assisted in career advancement of participants. It has also been a responsive programme in its flexibility and adaptation since its inception. In addition, the findings offer mechanisms for building further on the programme so as to maximise the outcomes for both participants and their places of practice.

Based on the positive feedback, the Consortium group has agreed to continue the CTT program and in 2010 revised the program based on participant evaluations. The NWG will continue to promote activities and advance knowledge through newsletter, website, telesynergy activities, and publications.

Contact Information:

nesse@mail.nih.gov
gcusack@cc.nih.gov