Developing Timely, Appealing Continuing Education for Researchers Using Unanticipated Problem Reporting and Education Program Participation Data
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Issue to Be Addressed: The IRB has implemented a comprehensive educational program to ensure that researchers understand the ethical principles and regulatory requirements related to the protection of human subjects. In addition, continuing education is required every three years. The refresher requirement can be met in a number of ways, one being completion of modules offered through a commercial, web-based program. Researchers can also choose any of a number of site-based, in-person trainings to fulfill this requirement. Site-based presentations provide timely, institution-specific guidance and can be customized to meet specific needs of stakeholders. Non-compliance and unanticipated problem reporting data (submitted to IRB between 2011 and 2014) reflect a lack of familiarity with IRB guidelines and policies, suggesting a need for increased education in these areas. Examples include: Using recruitment activities not approved by the IRB; using consent forms not approved by the IRB; inadequate process or documentation of consent/assent; non-compliance with research data and consent form storage requirements. Refresher course participation from the same period show most researchers continue to use the commercial program, which does not include institution-specific information, to meet the requirement (70.1% commercial versus 29.9% institution-specific).

Description and Evaluation of Program: Educational program participation data is recorded and analyzed by type of program (content, mode of delivery), and attendee demographics (researcher role, type of research). Unanticipated problems are reviewed for trends in types of problems (medication or laboratory errors, breach of confidentiality, protocol deviation/non-compliance) to inform preventive education. HRPP education staff attends IRB meetings to understand management and resolution of problems. This information is used to develop timely and appealing content with the goal of increasing site-based refresher course participation. Recently the HRPP Education Program and IRB, along with senior research study coordinators, conducted a panel discussion on non-compliance preventive and corrective action strategies taken from speakers’ actual experiences. Attendance for the panel was standing room only. An institutionally-hosted platform is being considered for delivery of education modules for researchers preferring the convenience of a web-based program.

Suggestions for Implementation at Other Sites: Identify sources of data available at your institution for increasing participation in HRPP education. Information may exist within the HRPP or another department, such as a Cancer Center, Human Resources, or Privacy Office. Use this information to promote communication between researchers and IRB by including the research community in education development and dissemination. Consider pros and cons of an education refresher requirement.