Cancer registrars ensure that timely, accurate, and complete data are maintained on all types of cancer diagnosed and/or treated within a health care institution or within a defined population. These data are then used to inform a wide variety of public health decisions and provide rich information for cancer diagnosis, treatment and prevention programs.

**What is a cancer registry?**

A cancer registry is an information system designed for the collection, management, and analysis of data on persons with the diagnosis of a malignant or neoplastic disease (cancer). 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 a particular type 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.

**What information is maintained in the cancer registry and how is it used?**

Cancer registries maintain a wide range of demographic and medical information, such as:

- Demographic information includes age, gender, race/ethnicity, birthplace, and residence.
- Medical history includes physical findings, screening information, occupation, and any history of a previous cancer.
- Diagnostic findings include types, dates, and results of procedures used to diagnose cancer.
- Cancer information, including primary site, cell type, and extent of disease.
- Cancer therapy, including surgery, radiation therapy, chemotherapy, hormone, or immunotherapy.
- Follow-up, including annual information about treatment, recurrence, and patient status.

---

**National Cancer Registrars Association**

Chartered in 1974, the National Cancer Registrars Association (NCRA) is a non-profit organization that represents more than 5,000 cancer registry professionals and Certified Tumor Registrars (CTR). Its mission is to serve as the premier education, credentialing, and advocacy resource for cancer data professionals. Learn more at www.ncra-usa.org.
Public health and medical providers utilize these data in a wide variety of ways. Specifically, they are used to:

- Evaluate patient outcome, quality of life, and satisfaction issues and implement procedures for 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, region or state level.
- Develop educational programs for health care providers, patients and the general 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 report cancer statistics for various healthcare agencies. Registrars work closely with physicians, administrators, researchers, and health care planners to provide support for cancer program development, ensure compliance of reporting standards, and serve as a valuable resource for cancer information with the ultimate goal of preventing and controlling cancer.

How does one become a cancer registrar?

Traditionally, cancer registrars were trained on the job. Today, formal education programs at colleges around the country teach cancer data management. Curricula include cancer and its management, medical terminology, anatomy and physiology, biostatistics and epidemiology, cancer data abstracting, database record management, cancer program management, cancer registry procedures, among others.

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 have attained the CTR credential. By January 1, 2015, hospitals that are accredited by the Commission on Cancer will require all case abstracting be performed by a CTR.

Cancer Registry Timeline

1926: First hospital registry at Yale-New Haven Hospital in New Haven, CT.
1956: American College of Surgeons requires a cancer registry for approved cancer programs.
1971: National Cancer Act budgets monies to the National Cancer Institute for research, detection and treatment of cancer.
1973: Surveillance, Epidemiology and End Results (SEER) Program of NCI establishes the first national Cancer Registry.
1983: NCRA's Council of Certification establishes the Certified Tumor Registrar (CTR®) credential.
1993: State laws make cancer a reportable disease.
How does one earn the CTR credential?

The first step is to determine eligibility. Requirements include education and experience in the cancer registry field.

Eligibility Routes

**Route A – Path 1**

*Education:* Successful completion of an Associate’s degree in Cancer Registry Management (CRM) or Cancer Information Management (CIM) from an NCRA-accredited Program.

*Experience:* Successful completion of a 160-hour clinical practicum in a CTR-staffed cancer registry.

**Route A – Path 2**

*Education:* Successful completion of a minimum of an Associate’s degree in any field or the equivalent (60 college-level credits) AND a certificate in Cancer Registry Management (CRM) or Cancer Information Management (CIM) from an NCRA-accredited Program.

*Experience:* Successful completion of a 160-hour clinical practicum in a CTR-staffed cancer registry.

**Route B**

*Education:* Successful completion of a minimum of an Associate’s degree in any field or the equivalent (60 college-level credits), including two semesters of Human Anatomy and Human Physiology. (Grade of C or better is required.)

*Experience:* 1,950 hours (equal to one year full-time) experience in the cancer registry field.

*(See attached CTR Exam Eligibility Chart for details.)*

Once eligibility requirements are met, candidates can take the exam during two, two-week-long testing periods. Applications must be submitted by the deadline noted for the desired exam date. Test questions are prepared by persons in the cancer registry profession from diverse backgrounds and job descriptions. The bi-annual CTR exam is composed of 250 multiple-choice items in the areas of:

- Registry organization and operations
- Concepts of abstracting, coding and follow-up
- Data analysis and interpretation
- Application of coding and staging principles

The exam is delivered via computer-based testing centers on behalf of NCRA's Council on Certification. There are over 300 testing locations throughout the United States. Candidates are allowed 4.5 hours to complete the two-part exam. The exam fee is $277 for NCRA members; $388 for all other candidates. Candidates receiving a passing score will be entitled to use “CTR” after their name and will receive a certificate from the Council on Certification. To maintain a certified status, a credentialed professional must complete 20 hours of continuing education credits every two years, plus pay an annual fee.

How does one get started?

Whether you are beginning your career or a seasoned professional seeking a new challenge, NCRA is here to help. NCRA provides training and educational opportunities to assist you in crafting a successful career in cancer registry management and to earn and maintain the CTR credential. NCRA's formal education programs, including associate degree and certificate programs, ensure students who successfully complete the training have fulfilled the eligibility requirements to take the CTR Exam. All accredited programs have undergone extensive review by NCRA and many are available online, offering distance learning options. For more information on NCRA's accredited programs, go to the “Become a Cancer Registrar” tab and click on the fact sheet entitled, NCRA Accredited Formal Education Programs.
How does one prepare to take the CTR Exam?

NCRA offers a host of tools to prepare candidates to take the CTR Exam, including an in-person CTR Exam prep workshop, CTR Exam readiness webinar series, a new CTR Exam online practice test, and several publications, including the NCRA Study Guide for the CTR Exam. Visit the “CTR Prep” tab for more details and to access these products.

How does one maintain the CTR credential?

A credentialed professional must complete 20 hours of continuing education (CE) credits every two years to maintain the CTR credential. NCRA's Center for Cancer Registry Education is a Learning Management System designed to provide easy access to high-quality educational programming. The Web site offers a variety of education products and services that will allow registrars to tailor their training and manage CE credits. Visit the “CE Opportunities” tab to learn more.

Questions About How to Become a Cancer Registrar?

Contact:
Mary Maul, Manager of Education Programs, NCRA
Call: 703-299-6640 Ext. 314
E-mail: mmaul@ncra-usa.org
CERTIFIED TUMOR REGISTRAR (CTR®) EXAM
ELIGIBILITY ROUTES

EDUCATION

ROUTE A - PATH 1
Successful completion of an Associate’s Degree in Cancer Registry Management (CRM) or Cancer Information Management (CIM) from an NCRA-accredited Program.

ROUTE A - PATH 2
Successful completion of a minimum of any Associate’s degree in any field or the equivalent (60 college-level credits).

ROUTE B
Successful completion of a minimum of any Associate’s degree in any field or the equivalent (60 college-level credits).

EXPERIENCE

Clinical Practicum
Successful completion of a 160-hour clinical practicum in a CTR-staffed cancer registry.
http://www.ncra-usa.org/160

Clinical Practicum
Successful completion of a 160-hour clinical practicum in a CTR-staffed cancer registry.
http://www.ncra-usa.org/160

Cancer Registry Work Experience
1,950 hours (equal to one year full time) experience in the cancer registry field.

NEED MORE DETAILS ON THE CTR CREDENTIAL?
Web site: www.ctrexam.org • E-mail: ctrexam@ncra-usa.org • Phone: 703-299-6640 Ext. 312

CTR EXAM ELIGIBILITY QUESTIONS?
Visit: www.ctrexam.org/eligibility
Need your individual eligibility to be reviewed? Access the CTR Exam Eligibility Request Form at www.ctrexam.org/eligibility.
Complete the form in its entirety and submit as noted on the form.

Certificate Programs count towards the 60 college-level credits education requirement for CTR Exam eligibility. Courses recommended for college credit by the American Council on Education (ACE) are also accepted for the 60 college-level credits education requirement.