Fostering Interdisciplinary Research and Practice

Showcase “Best Practice”

► **Process Improved:** The UW Comprehensive Cancer Center (UWCCC) is a “matrix” organization, bringing together researchers and clinicians from departments and programs across campus and beyond. In preparation for the renewal of the core grant from the National Cancer Institute, the leaders of the Center’s nine research programs and thirteen disease based working groups participated in working sessions to create a matrix diagram that cross-referenced initiatives at each intersecting cell. This matrix diagram allowed for multiple levels of analysis about current efforts and where gaps exist. The process resulted in people discovering new opportunities for collaborative research.

► **Unit(s):** University of Wisconsin Comprehensive Cancer Center

► **Customers of the Process and Their Needs:** The UWCCC has 260 members from 9 schools and 55 departments on the UW campus organized around nine research programs and thirteen disease groups. The mission is to foster and facilitate interactions that magnify the potential for discovery and translation related to cancer that surpass what can be done by individual investigators working in isolation or within their traditional academic silos.

► **Problem/Opportunity Statement:** How to harness and leverage the breadth and depth of scientific expertise among UWCCC members to focus on cancer related discovery and translation of the discoveries into effective clinical applications.

► **Changes Made:** The process to create the matrix diagram illustrated the benefit of working sessions where leaders learned about the depth and breadth of expertise existing in other segments of the Center. Leaders found it so informative and successful that they proposed continuing these sessions on a regular basis.

► **Results:** As the leaders participated in the process, discussion revealed heretofore unrecognized opportunities for collaboration. This in turn provided the incentive for them to lead the discussions within their research groups to explore new research avenues. The “matrix” has become a tool to not only assess status but identify and stimulate future research.

► **Lessons Learned:** If you get people in a room and provide a structure for focused discussion, they will talk, and results may exceed your expectations.
**Next Steps:** We will establish a schedule for regular meetings of the program leaders and disease group leaders to ensure that we maximize our ability to leverage the diverse expertise of our members to conduct multidisciplinary collaborative research aimed at discovery and translation in cancer research, education, and community outreach. We will continue to use the “matrix” as a work in progress.

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