

NCRA's Education Department has prepared these FAQs to help potential cancer registrars better understand the criteria needed to successfully complete an NCRA-Accredited Formal Education Program in Cancer Registry Management. If you have additional questions about these programs, contact Mary Maul at mmaul@ncra-usa.org or 703-299-6640 Ext. 314. NCRA's Council on Certification is the best resource for questions about the CTR Exam, including exam content, exam dates and locations, and eligibility requirements. Questions about the exam can be addressed by visiting the website at www.CTRExam.org or contacting the Council at ctrexam@ncra-usa.org or 703-299-6640 Ext. 312.

What is a cancer registrar?

Cancer registrars are data information specialists that capture a complete history, diagnosis, treatment, and health status for every cancer patient in the U.S. The data provide essential information to researchers, healthcare providers, and public health officials to better monitor and advance cancer treatments, conduct research, and improve cancer prevention and screening programs. [Learn more!](#)

What are the NCRA-Accredited Cancer Registry Management (CRM) Programs?

Several schools across the country offer NCRA-accredited Associate's Degrees and/or Certificates in Cancer Registry Management. These programs are either instructor-led or online.

These accredited programs follow standards set by NCRA's Formal Education Program Review Committee (FEPRC). The program content is the same for all, but they differ regarding start times (some are on a semester schedule/others are rolling admissions); cost (in-state/out-of-state tuition); and type of instruction (self-directed online or classroom/online instructor-led).

NCRA offers a self-directed, online certificate in Cancer Registry Management through the American Health Information Management Association (AHIMA). Review the complete list of [NCRA-Accredited Formal Education Programs](#).

How do I choose what NCRA-Accredited Program is best for me?

Your choice depends on your educational background. Individuals who have already completed an Associate's Degree in any area (or the equivalent of 60 college-level credits) tend to pursue a certificate program in Cancer Registry Management. Individuals who have not completed any or have little college-level coursework, tend to pursue an associate's degree in Cancer Registry Management.

How long will it take to complete the CRM Program?

The length of time to complete a CRM Program depends on whether a student is enrolled in a program through a college or working in a self-directed online program.

Once I successfully complete an NCRA-Accredited Program, have I earned the CTR credential?

No. Successful completion of an NCRA-Accredited Program will result in a certificate or degree, but not the CTR credential. To gain the CTR credential, candidates must apply and pass the CTR exam. NCRA's Council on Certification develops and administers the CTR exam. There are three eligibility paths to be able to sit for the CTR exam. Review the [CTR Exam Eligibility Routes Graphic](#) for more details.

What are the benefits of having the CTR credential?

Most hospitals and central cancer registries require their employees to hold the CTR credential. The credential demonstrates a requisite knowledge and professional competence needed within the cancer registry field. The CTR is nationally recognized in the recruitment and retention of registry personnel. Individuals may be hired without having the CTR credential, though most employment opportunities do ask for it.

Are there prerequisites required for NCRA-Accredited Programs?

Yes. NCRA's FEPRC requires four prerequisites for all its accredited programs. These prerequisite courses are critical and ensure students have the base knowledge needed to begin the Cancer Registry Management coursework. The four prerequisites are:

- Computers in Healthcare
- Human Anatomy and Physiology I
- Human Anatomy II
- Medical Terminology

IMPORTANT: There are no exceptions. Work experience cannot substitute for meeting the prerequisite requirements.

The specifications of the four prerequisites are listed at the end of these FAQs. A course is defined as a minimum of three college-level credit hours. Successful completion is defined as having earned a grade of "C" or better; course auditing is not accepted.

If you have not met the prerequisite requirements as outlined in the definitions at the end of these FAQs, you can take the following AHIMA online courses: Anatomy, Physiology & Human Disease; Pathophysiology and Pharmacology; Medical Terminology; and Computer Basics in Healthcare. NCRA's FEPRC has deemed that these courses meet the prerequisite requirements. The online courses can be found at: www.CancerRegistryEducation.org/crm-program. NCRA recommends that students take no more than two of the prerequisites at one time.

For students in NCRA-accredited programs at colleges, the school will require students to submit transcripts to prove successful completion of the prerequisites prior to beginning the program. (Some NCRA-accredited programs include the prerequisite courses as part of the coursework. For students in these programs, submitting transcripts prior to enrollment is not required.) Students in the online NCRA-AHIMA Cancer Registry Management (CRM) Certificate Program will indicate, prior to starting the program, that they have successfully completed the four prerequisites. (Students will check a box to verify completion.)

I already completed two semesters of A&P and one semester of medical terminology in my degree program. Do I have to repeat these courses to enroll in the NCRA-AHIMA CRM Certificate Program?

If each course was college-level AND a minimum of three-credits AND you received a grade of "C" or better, then your past coursework would fulfill the prerequisite requirements for the NCRA-AHIMA CRM Certificate Program. You will, however, need to take a three-credit, college-level course in *Computers in Healthcare* and earn a grade of "C" or better in order to complete all the prerequisite requirements.

I completed my nursing degree in 1984. Will my A&P courses fulfill the prerequisite requirements to enroll in the NCRA-AHIMA CRM Certificate Program?

If your courses in A&P were college-level AND totaled six-credit hours AND you received a grade of "C" or better, they fulfill the prerequisite requirements for the NCRA-AHIMA CRM Certificate Program. (There are no expiration dates for college-level courses.) You will, however, need to take a three-credit, college-level course in *Medical Terminology* and a three-credit, college-level course in *Computers in Healthcare* and earn a grade of "C" or better in both classes in order to complete all the prerequisite requirements.

I completed a course in Computer Basics. Will that fulfill the prerequisite requirement?

No. The required computer course needs to be specific to healthcare and meet the criteria outlined in the definition provided at the end of these FAQs. A basic course in computers does not qualify.

Is there a clinical practicum?

Yes. A 160-hour clinical practicum is the final step in all NCRA-Accredited Formal Education Programs. The practicum includes a specific number of hours required for specific activities and the student must be supervised by a CTR. Some activities do not have to be completed at a facility, but can be accomplished working with a mentor and/or working online through approved websites ([CDC Cyber Cancer Registry](#) and [SEER*Educate](#)). [Review the list of required practicum activities and related hours.](#)

Can I begin the 160-hour clinical practicum before I finish the coursework?

No. Cancer registry facilities will not accept students who have not completed all the coursework. The purpose of the practicum is to apply the theory and methodology learned in the program, so it is critical that students finish the coursework before beginning the practicum.

Do the 160-hours for the clinical practicum need to be continuous?

No, the 160 hours do not need to be continuous. The hours do not need to be scheduled as four, 40-hour weeks. You will need, however, to complete the practicum based on the timeline required by your school.

Does NCRA help place students in a clinical practicum?

Students in NCRA-accredited programs at colleges will work with the school to find a facility for the clinical practicum. Many of these colleges already have affiliation agreements with facilities where they can place cancer registry students. (Note: The practicum is scheduled during the student's last semester.)

For students in the NCRA-AHIMA CRM Certificate Program, NCRA will help find a facility in which to complete the clinical practicum. Finding a facility is a collaborative effort between the student and NCRA. As a result, students will be required to be proactive in securing a facility. NCRA recommends the following:

- Join your state cancer registry association and network with members. This is the best way to find a registry for your clinical practicum, since members know of facilities in the area that are willing to help. [List of State Cancer Registry Associations.](#)
- Search Commission on Cancer (CoC)-accredited hospitals in your city. The list of all [CoC-accredited cancer programs](#) in the country is searchable by zip code. Start by contacting the cancer registry department directly and speaking with the cancer registry manager.
- Sign up for NCRA's Mentoring Program. NCRA seeks to match students with local mentors and often times this is a good way to find a facility for a practicum. (NCRA cannot guarantee that your mentor will be nearby, but all efforts are made to secure a local cancer registrar.) [Learn more about NCRA's Mentoring Program.](#)

Can volunteer hours in a cancer registry count toward the 160 hours needed for the clinical practicum?

Yes. Activities required for the practicum can be completed while serving in a cancer registry as a volunteer. In fact, sometimes it is easier to secure the practicum as a volunteer, rather than an intern, since there is often less paperwork and fewer legal issues for volunteers than for formal interns.

Are there other requirements for the 160-hour clinical practicum?

Whether you are an intern or a volunteer, you may be asked to provide a record of immunizations and be willing to submit to a background check and drug test. Some facilities will require professional liability insurance.

How do I learn more about the CTR credential?

Go to the CTR Exam website (www.ctrexam.org) to learn more about the exam and download the current **CTR Exam Handbook & Application**. The exam is offered three times a year and details on the exam dates, application deadlines, and exam locations can be found on the website.

Can I have my CTR Exam eligibility reviewed?

Yes. If you would like your individual exam eligibility to be reviewed, complete the **CTR Exam Eligibility Determination Form** in its entirety and submit it via one of the methods noted on the form. Please allow 6-8 weeks to process.

Where do I direct my questions regarding the CTR credential?

If you have questions about the CTR credential, including eligibility, please visit the CTR Exam website at www.ctrexam.org, e-mail ctrexam@ncra-usa.org, or call 703-299-6640 Ext. 312.

NCRA-ACCREDITED FORMAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS PREREQUISITE DEFINITIONS

NCRA-Accredited Formal Education Programs (both associate degrees and certificates) require the successful completion of four prerequisites. The prerequisites must be college-level courses taken for credit or the equivalent as approved by NCRA's Formal Education Program Review Committee. The prerequisites include: Computers in Healthcare; Human Anatomy and Physiology I and II; and Medical Terminology. A course is defined as three college-level credit hours. Successful completion is defined as having earned a grade of C or better; course auditing is not accepted.

Computers in Healthcare

The Computers in Healthcare course should provide a general overview of computers and the Internet and the role each has played in healthcare and will play in the future. Students should learn the basics of hardware and software and should gain a general understanding of the most commonly used applications in healthcare. The course should include an introduction to Health Information Management (HIM) applications, data quality, storage and retrieval, and clinical information systems.

Human Anatomy and Physiology I and Human Anatomy II

Human Anatomy and Physiology courses should include the study of the structures of the human body and how the systems within the body support its function. Areas of study should include: bones, muscles, tissues, and supportive systems that promote life in the body. The course should also include information on human physiology, which is the study of the normal mechanical, physical, and biochemical functions of the human body, including the cells, organs, and human systems. The curriculum should also address physiology/pharmacology with an emphasis placed on the characteristics of the disease processes affecting the human body (i.e. cancer). It should also include the study of causes, diagnosis, and treatment of disease as well as an understanding of the basic principles of pharmacology.

Medical Terminology

The Medical Terminology course should cover medical terminology, symbols, and abbreviations, and the application language in the field of healthcare. The main focus should be on the study of medical terms through word origin and structure. The course should also include the language of surgical and diagnostic procedures as well as medical specialties.