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Professional Core Competencies for Infection Control Nurses

Infection Control
Nurses Association
*Education Sub
Committee*

November 2000

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Copies available from ICNA, c/o Fitwise, Drumcross Hall, Bathgate EH48 4JT

Telephone: 01506 811077 Fax: 01506 811477 e-mail: info@fitwise.co.uk

Introduction

The competencies for Infection Control Nurses (ICNs) described in this document were developed as a result of a consensus meeting organised by the Education Sub Committee of the Infection Control Nurses Association (ICNA) in July 1999. Delegates were sought from the membership of the ICNA, with advice from relevant academic sources. Hence, these competencies have been written by practising Infection Control Nurses. Following initial editing to remove duplication and standardise language, the document was circulated to all full members of the Association prior to ratification by the National Executive Committee and independent review by management consultants.

The competencies aim to define the standards of practice expected of a competent ICN by identifying key components of practice (termed domains); the specific competencies required to work effectively within each domain; and key criteria that describe each competency and against which performance or competence can be measured. They describe core, generic competencies that are applicable to all practitioners in infection control. Whilst they provide a national standard for the United Kingdom and Ireland, it should be noted that regional variances across the four countries have not been included. They do not define specific competencies for related functions that form parts of the role for some ICNs e.g. Public Health, Communicable Disease Control and Tissue Viability. It should be remembered that these competencies are not static and will require regular review to account for the continuing changes within nursing and nurse education.

Defining competencies for ICNs is an important development that is extremely relevant in today's healthcare environment. At the core of the clinical governance framework are the principles of ensuring the delivery of a quality service, continual professional development and professional self-regulation. Defining the competencies expected of a proficient ICN provides a framework within which performance can be evaluated, training needs identified and areas for professional growth recognised.

Assessment of competence is now a feature of post-registration nurse training courses and will form part of the new career framework for nurses described in the NHS document Making a Difference (Department of Health 1999). The draft descriptor and standard for higher level practice published by the United Kingdom Central Council for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting (UKCC) in 1999 indicates that the attainment of this award will involve the assessment of competencies.

The level at which these competencies have been set is intended to relate to an expert practitioner who uses reasoning, critical thinking, reflection and analysis to inform their assessment and decision making. Additional competencies are likely to be required for those wishing to progress towards the UKCC Higher Level Practice award. Practitioners new to the role are unlikely to be able to demonstrate the full range of competencies described here, as these are only likely to be acquired through a combination of formal educational programmes, informal learning opportunities and experience of using professional knowledge. It is anticipated that these competencies will be used in curriculum development and provide a framework for the progression of new practitioners. It is

recognised that ICNs' roles may vary and that not all the competencies described may be required for individual ICNs to perform their particular role. For example, many of the criteria described under the domain "Management and Leadership" will only be applicable to an ICN who is employed to manage the infection control service. Similarly not all aspects of clinical research will feature in the role of every ICN.

The competencies should be used in conjunction with existing guidance on professional practice published by the UKCC, for example The Code of Professional Conduct (1992), Standards of Record Keeping (1993), Post Registration Education (1997) and Scope in Practice (1997).

The next phase in the process will be the development of tools that individuals can use to assess performance and may ultimately facilitate self-regulation in line with recommendations (The New NHS – Making a Difference DoH 1999).

Competencies Working Group of the Education Sub Committee of the ICNA

Debbie King RGN BSc(Hons) DPSN

Jennie Wilson RGN BSc(Hons)

Lauren Tew RGN DipN(Lond) BSc(Hons) PGDip(HE) RNT

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Summary of Competencies

Domain One: *Specialist Knowledge*

<i>AREA OF COMPETENCE</i>	<i>COMPETENCY</i>
Microbiology	The application of microbiological knowledge to promote health, prevent and control infections and communicable disease.
Immunology	The application of immunological knowledge to promote health and control infection and communicable disease.
Epidemiology	The application of epidemiological knowledge to control infections and communicable disease.
Practices to Prevent and Control Infection	The application of knowledge about infection control practice to prevent and control infection in clinical and non-clinical environments.
Decontamination	The application of the principles of cleaning, disinfection and sterilisation to promote a safe environment.

Domain Two: *Evidence-based Practice*

<i>AREA OF COMPETENCE</i>	<i>COMPETENCY</i>
Using Research in Practice	Use of evidence to critically evaluate and develop standards for practice.
Using Audit to Improve Quality	Use of core audit skills. Surveillance of infection.

Domain Three: *Teaching and Learning*

<i>AREA OF COMPETENCE</i>	<i>COMPETENCY</i>
Facilitating Learning in Others	Use of appropriate strategies and opportunities to share knowledge on infection prevention and control.
	Use of appraisal to facilitate learning.
Self learning and professional development	The development of own professional knowledge and skills through lifelong learning

Domain Four: *Management and Leadership*

<i>AREA OF COMPETENCE</i>	<i>COMPETENCY</i>
Managing an Infection Control Service	Use of a co-ordinated approach to ensure effective management of the service.

Domain Five: *Clinical Research*

<i>AREA OF COMPETENCE</i>	<i>COMPETENCY</i>
Interpreting Research	Critical analysis of published literature.
Conducting Research	Participation in research independently or collaboratively.

Domain One *Specialist Knowledge*

1. Area of Competence	Microbiology
Competency	The application of microbiological knowledge to promote health, prevent and control infection and communicable disease
Key criteria	
1.1.1	Seeks and interprets microbiological data to assist in the prevention and control of infection
1.1.2	Appraises the clinical relevance of microbiological data to patients' well being and advises accordingly
1.1.3	Distinguishes between modes of transmission of micro-organisms and recommends appropriate methods of control
1.1.4	Assesses patients, service-users and situations to estimate the risk of transfer and acquisition of micro-organisms
1.1.5	Selects and initiates appropriate actions to prevent and control infection
1.1.6	Reviews microbiological data to evaluate the efficacy of the intervention
1.1.7	Incorporates relevant legislation and guidance into practice (e.g. COSHH)
2. Area of Competence	Immunology
Competency	The application of immunological knowledge to promote health and control infection and communicable disease
Key criteria	
1.2.1	Assesses the susceptibility of individual patients and clients to infection
1.2.2	Formulates and initiates appropriate strategies to minimise the risk of infection

Domain One *Specialist Knowledge*

3. Area of Competence	Epidemiology
Competency	The application of epidemiological knowledge to prevent and control infections and communicable disease
Key criteria	
1.3.1	Seeks, assembles and interprets epidemiological data to assist in the investigation, prevention and control of infection
1.3.2	Uses relevant information technology to collect and interpret data where available
1.3.3	Synthesises epidemiological data and knowledge to formulate action plans relevant to local needs
1.3.4	Devises strategic plans to prevent and control infections
1.3.5	Investigates and manages outbreaks, seeking advice from those with expertise where necessary
1.3.6	Reports on, and evaluates, the efficacy of interventions to inform future practice

4. Area of Competence	Practices to prevent and control infection
Competency	The application of knowledge of the transmission of micro-organisms to prevent and control infection
Key criteria	
1.4.1	Critically evaluates information and research to formulate advice on the prevention and control of infection
1.4.2	Synthesises knowledge of infection control and systems of work in clinical and non-clinical areas in order to formulate advice for all services ¹ on the prevention and control of infection
1.4.3	Appraises measures to prevent and control infection taking into account the individual patient or service-user needs and psychosocial issues
1.4.4	Incorporates relevant legislation, national and local guidance and wider public health issues into guidance and advice given
1.4.5	Appraises the impact of epidemiological, social, political and professional trends on infection control practice.
1.4.6	Undertakes regular review and evaluation of practice and initiates change as appropriate
1.4.7	Acknowledges own limitations and seeks advice from those with specific expertise where necessary
1.4.8	Formulates assessments of infection control hazards, identifying when they occur, the risks related to them and the actions required to eliminate or minimise the risks.

1. These areas may include; catering, environmental hygiene, waste disposal, laundry management and estates management, for example

Domain One *Specialist Knowledge*

5. Area of Competence	Decontamination
Competency	The application of knowledge of the principles of cleaning, disinfection and sterilisation to promote a safe environment
Key criteria	
1.5.1	Distinguishes levels of risk presented by individuals, equipment and the environment, selects appropriate methods of decontamination and advises accordingly
1.5.2	Formulates and reviews policies that reflect knowledge of the principles of decontamination
1.5.3	Seeks advice when necessary from those with expertise in testing and validation of decontamination processes
1.5.4	Incorporates legislation and relevant guidance into practice
1.5.5	Links local decontamination strategies to wider environmental issues

Domain Two *Evidence-based Practice*

1. Area of competence	Using research in practice
Competency	The use of evidence to critically evaluate and develop standards for practice
Key criteria	
2.1.1	Identifies sources of expert opinion, evidence and information
2.1.2	Reviews diverse sources of information including professional journals, computer databases, systematic reviews and the Internet.
2.1.3	Establishes links with other individuals and organisations to maximise exposure to a wide range of information
2.1.4	Evaluates clinical practice in relation to its evidence base and clinical effectiveness
2.1.5	Critically evaluates complex and sometimes conflicting information
2.1.6	Synthesises evidence to produce written material in a logical, structured format, that is appropriate in style and content for the user
2.1.7	Develops clinical guidelines that are evidence-based to promote good infection prevention and control practice, collaboratively and in partnership with key people
2.1.8	Communicates research findings effectively in both verbal and written forms, through appropriate channels of communication
2.1.9	Appraises the barriers to the use of research findings, and develops strategies to overcome them e.g. ownership at ward level
2.1.10	Plans strategies to implement evidence-based practice, selecting and adapting the most relevant to meet local needs and the target audience
2.1.11	Uses audit to evaluate the effectiveness of interventions

Domain Two *Evidence-based Practice*

2. Area of competence	Using audit to improve quality
Competency	The use of core audit skills
Key criteria	
2.2.1	Formulates and implements a programme for improving the quality of care which takes into account priorities, objectives and available resources
2.2.2	Establishes links with key professionals, both those who can use the results to inform practice and those who can provide expert advice and guidance
2.2.3	Selects appropriate quality indicators or benchmarks
2.2.4	Constructs standards that are agreed, achievable, measurable, objective, research based and user-friendly
2.2.5	Incorporates national guidelines and legal requirements into local standards
2.2.6	Distinguishes target population and develops and uses appropriate methodology and data collection tools
2.2.7	Appraises limitations of methods.
2.2.8	Uses systems to collect data which will produce reliable and reproducible findings
2.2.9	Incorporates the principles of the Data Protection Act into methodology and data handling
2.2.10	Uses professional judgement in recognising and challenging poor practice
2.2.11	Interprets findings and produces logical, structured reports, appropriate in style and content for the intended reader.
2.2.12	Disseminates results to relevant clinical and non clinical staff in a timely manner
2.2.13	Formulates strategies to promote and facilitate the review of clinical and non clinical practice in response to results of audit

Domain Two *Evidence-based Practice*

3. Area of competence	Using audit to improve quality
Competency	The use of surveillance
Key criteria	
2.3.1	Formulates and implements a programme for improving the quality of care which takes into account priorities, objectives and available resources
2.3.2	Establishes and maintains dialogue with key professionals, both those who can use the results to inform practice and those who can provide expert advice and guidance
2.3.3	Uses appropriate epidemiological methods to collect or co-ordinate the collection of data and ensure reliable and reproducible results
2.3.4	Analyses data using appropriate epidemiological measures and statistical tests, seeking expert advice where appropriate
2.3.5	Interprets results, identifying trends and adverse events, assessing the relationship to benchmarks
2.3.6	Formulates strategies to promote and facilitate the review of clinical practice in response to the results of surveillance
2.3.7	Incorporates the principles of the Data Protection Act into methodology and data handling
2.3.8	Interprets findings and produces logical, structured reports, appropriate in style and content for the intended reader
2.3.9	Disseminates results to relevant clinical and non clinical staff in a timely manner

Domain Three *Teaching & Learning*

<p>1. Area of competence Competency</p>	<p>Facilitating learning in others The use of appropriate strategies and opportunities to share knowledge on infection prevention and control</p>
<p>Key criteria</p> <p>3.1.1 Assesses the training needs of target groups</p> <p>3.1.2 Constructs an objective-based teaching programme that meets the needs of the learner and the organisation</p> <p>3.1.3 Formulates and implements teaching and learning strategies for the identified groups or individuals</p> <p>3.1.4 Uses a variety of methods to deliver appropriate information effectively</p> <p>3.1.5 Manages the learning environment</p> <p>3.1.6 Recognises and uses opportunities to facilitate learning providing situational support as necessary</p> <p>3.1.7 Evaluates the effectiveness of the teaching and learning process</p>	
<p>2. Area of competence Competency</p>	<p>Facilitating learning in others The use of appraisal to facilitate learning</p>
<p>Key criteria</p> <p>3.2.1 Differentiates and implements relevant assessment and evaluation techniques</p> <p>3.2.2 Recognises opportunities to provide constructive and effective feedback</p> <p>3.2.3 Plans and promotes opportunities to optimise learning</p> <p>3.2.4 Evaluates the effectiveness of the appraisal experience</p>	
<p>3. Area of competence Competency</p>	<p>Self learning and professional development The development of own professional knowledge and skills through life long learning</p>
<p>Key criteria</p> <p>3.3.1 Uses reflection to formulate and prioritise strategies for self development</p> <p>3.3.2 Measures own competence, analyses deficits and recognises own strengths and limitations</p> <p>3.3.3 Develops and improves own competence in structured ways e.g. academic courses, conferences and through self assessment</p> <p>3.3.4 Uses a range of resources to develop and update specialist knowledge</p>	

Domain Four *Management & Leadership*

1. Area of competence	Managing an infection control service
Competency	The use of a co-ordinated approach to ensure the service is managed effectively
Key criteria	
4.1.1	Formulates an organisation wide infection control programme with clearly defined objectives in collaboration with other members of the ICT which includes audit of practice, surveillance and education
4.1.2	Reviews and evaluates the service strategy annually, taking into account relevant legislation and published professional guidelines, forming short, medium and long term goals
4.1.3	In collaboration with other members of the ICT keeps key stakeholders informed through agreed feedback mechanisms eg annual report
4.1.4	Reviews and updates policies, procedures and standards for the organisation to prevent and control infection, in collaboration with other experts and specialists e.g. Occupational Health, Microbiologists, Consultants in Communicable Disease Control, Consultants in Public Health Medicine
4.1.5	Prioritises service provision taking into account varying demands and available resources
4.1.6	Negotiates resource allocation by demonstrating cost benefits of infection control
4.1.7	Works autonomously and seeks collaborative relationships with others across and within professional boundaries
4.1.8	Establishes and maintains professional networks within the healthcare organisation
4.1.9	Acts as an expert resource in infection prevention and control at a clinical and organisational level
4.1.10	Co-ordinates provision of specialist advice to the organisation that is both proactive and reactive
4.1.11	Seeks active contribution to service development activities e.g. commissioning new buildings, contracting services
4.1.12	Formulates a strategy for, and demonstrates, effective communication at all levels, using available resources and ensuring full documentation in line with the UKCC Standard for Record Keeping (1993)
4.1.13	Builds and maintains optimal relationships within the ICT
4.1.14	Promotes the infection control team and ensures an accessible and approachable service
4.1.15	Actively promotes development and innovation in practice relating to infection control
4.1.16	Manages change by synthesising knowledge and expertise
4.1.17	Recognises and resolves conflict
4.1.18	Ensures that the service provided is confidential and non-judgemental
4.1.19	Organises ongoing audit of the infection control service, amending service provision in response to the needs of the service users

Domain Five *Clinical Research*

1. Area of competence	Interpreting research
Competency	The critical analysis of published literature related to Infection Control
Key criteria	
5.1.1	Accesses a full range of resources to search the literature for relevant information
5.1.2	Adopts an objective approach to the review of published literature
5.1.3	Selects relevant published literature
5.1.4	Differentiates different research methodologies
5.1.5	Critically evaluates the reliability, validity and application to practice of the published literature
2. Area of Competence	Conducting research
Competency	The participation in research independently or collaboratively
Key criteria	
5.2.1	Identifies research opportunities and formulates appropriate research questions
5.2.2	Accesses key personnel and sources of data to facilitate the research process
5.2.3	Appraises personal and organisational limitations in respect of ability to undertake research
5.2.4	Constructs an appropriate proposal to address the research question which takes into account ethical considerations
5.2.5	Defines the data required, systems for collection and methods of analysis
5.2.6	Critically interprets data and formulates proposal for action
5.2.7	Communicates research findings effectively in both verbal and non-verbal forms

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Appendix 1

Members of the Competencies Consensus Group

Mary Ayton	Martin Kiernan
Kath Banfield	Andrew Kingsley
Andrea Buckles	Jean Lawrence
George Castledine	Val Leggett
Lynne Clarke	Susan Macqueen
Molly Courtenay	Maurice Madeo
Evonne Curran	Dee May
Lisa Day	Ian McCabe
Tracey Gauchi	Janet McCulloch
Paul Hateley	Judy Potter
Mary Henry	Jacqui Prieto
Dawn Hill	Linda Skipper
Janet Howard	Sarah Stevenson
Fiona Hughes	Jean Summers
Jacky Hunt	Linda Watterson
Liz Jenner	Jennie Wilson

Education Sub Committee of ICNA (at time of project)

Eilish Creamer
Carol Kerr
Debbie King (Co-ordinator)
Kath Little
Lauren Tew

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INFECTION CONTROL NURSES ASSOCIATION
PROFESSIONAL CORE COMPETENCIES FOR INFECTION CONTROL NURSES

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