

Quality Practice Program Framework

Introduction

The idea that a regulatory body must have a quality assurance program seems logical and simple at first but becomes more complicated when quality assurance methods must be balanced against issues such as feasibility and relevance to registrants. The College has taken one approach since 2009; a change is needed.

- The regulatory environment has changed since 2009. There is evidence to support the use of risks to identify practices and practitioners who are experiencing competence drift and to target regulatory resources more effectively (Zubin Austin).
- The College developed a strong strategic plan that includes engagement, evidence, and quality improvement as areas of focus.
- Feedback from registrants in spring 2019 provided insight into what is important to them: meaningful monitoring of continuing competence that supports them to improve their practice.
- The reality of continuing competence is that it is unreasonable to micromanage an individual's competence across their careers and in the range of practice settings that exist (David Cane). Furthermore, it can be counter-productive to micromanage an individual's competence because that stifles engagement with professionals who are accustomed to exercising their clinical reasoning to solve complex problems (Zubin Austin).
- Continuing competence and performance are complex; competence has numerous independent features and relies on the physical therapist's health and wellness, professional development and their practice setting (Zubin Austin, Susan Glover Takahashi).

The Quality Assurance Program (QAP) established in 2009 was a pioneer in the use of risks and supports with individual registrants through the ASR. And the RCA was a bold move to protect the public by assessing the continuing competence of all physical therapists on a regular basis. However, even without the major technical problems that occurred during both administrations of the RCA, there remained questions about its cost effectiveness and whether the same goal of identifying those in need of further interventions could be achieved at a lower cost.

This new Framework is true to the mandate of serving and protecting the public. It acknowledges the complexity of professional competence and the variation inherent in physical therapy practice. It places a value on professionalism and quality improvement, in the understanding that this approach, inclusive of both individuals and workplaces, will raise the standard of service provided to the public. The Framework uses data to focus quality improvement activities and to identify individuals who might be experiencing competence drift. At the same time, in scenarios where physical therapists do not comply with requirements or perhaps are in situations that place them at higher risk of competence drift, the Framework allows them to be supported through more intensive interventions in order to ensure protection of the public.

Authority and Mandate

The *BC Health Professions Act* states:

It is the duty of a college at all times to serve and protect the public, and to exercise its powers and discharge its responsibilities under all enactments in the public interest. (HPA, 16(1)). Three of a college's objects relate directly to quality assurance:

- to establish, monitor and enforce standards of practice to enhance the quality of practice and reduce incompetent, impaired or unethical practice amongst registrants (HPA, 16(2)d);
- to establish and maintain a continuing competency program to promote high practice standards amongst registrants (HPA, 16(2)e); and
- to establish, monitor and enforce standards of professional ethics amongst registrants (HPA, 16(2)g).

The QAP – now known as the Quality Practice program - will be administered in accordance with the Health Professions Act (26.1 and 26.2) and with College Bylaws Part 5. The Bylaws will need to be reviewed considering any changes to the program.

Purpose, Definition and Standards

The purpose of the Quality Practice program is to monitor and support the continuing competence of physical therapists in British Columbia.

Continuing competence is the ongoing ability of a practitioner to demonstrate competent practice in such areas as safety, effectiveness, and ethics.

The standard against which competence is assessed is the *Competency Profile for Physiotherapists in Canada* (2017).

Guiding Principles, and Design Features

Guiding principles and design features will drive the development, implementation, and evaluation of the Quality Practice program.

Guiding Principles

1. To contribute to the broad College mandate to serve the public interest
2. To acknowledge that physical therapists:
 - a. meet high standards for entry to practice
 - b. are expected to be individually responsible for their ongoing development and improvement
 - c. can experience competence drift at any stage of their career
3. To use a risk-based approach¹ for individual competence maintenance and improvement
4. To be meaningful and relevant to all physical therapists and their practice scope, clinical setting and changing personal circumstances throughout their professional career
5. To enhance uptake of practice standards and continuous development of essential competencies so quality care is provided and contributes to client outcomes

¹ A risk-based approach focusses on regulating by addressing risks that cause harm, rather than by creating/enforcing rules. Adopting this approach for individual competence maintenance and improvement allows consideration of several aspects that contribute to competent practice, more than just an understanding of the rules.

6. To reflect the available evidence and regulatory experience on continuing competence and quality assurance programs
7. To be transparent with the public and profession about the program's strengths, limitations, and activities
8. To achieve best outcomes using proportionate, cost-effective interventions

Design Features

1. A balance of individual physical therapist accountability with College oversight of continuing competence for safe, effective, and ethical practice
2. Multiple activities and tools to promote, support, assess and monitor individuals at various intensity and frequency
3. Activities and tools will be grounded in the essential competencies for physical therapists, practice standards, and good practice conduct
4. Activities and tools will be connected to each other in a program proportionate to physical therapist risk
5. The program will be supported by appropriate legislative and by-law authority ensuring due process
6. Registrants will be engaged in the design, operations, and evaluation of the program
7. The College will allocate resources to achieve optimal outcomes and minimize bureaucracy for the College and registrants
8. The program will be supported by partnerships and a shared desire with stakeholders to contribute to a high-functioning profession by system-wide coordination of development, improvement, and accountability
9. Registrants will know what information is protected by confidentiality laws
10. Evaluation is important; the program will be evaluated regularly to understand its outcomes and maintain alignment with the strategic plan and principles

Conclusion

The purpose of the new Framework is to engage the profession and drive continuing competence in a multi-faceted way. The Framework focuses on a registrant's individual responsibility to practice competently and provides a number of measures and resources to help those registrants understand their own risks and ways to mitigate them. These measures include:

- an annual self assessment and workplace assessment using indicators of a high-quality supportive workplace known to contribute to registrant competency, with targeted resources identified using aggregated risk data from the assessments
- guidance and support of high-quality professional development activities including advocacy for the creation of these opportunities
- more intensive formal assessment of those registrants at risk of competence drift
- practice support for those registrants found to require support in some areas of practice with the goal to help them return to competence