A set of competencies to suit all prescribers has been developed with multidisciplinary input

Competency framework to meet the needs of all prescribers

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Since 2000, the healthcare professionals who have taken on prescribing responsibilities have been supported in the development of safe, effective prescribing practice by the publication of profession-specific prescribing competency frameworks. Developed by the National Prescribing Centre, these resources included frameworks for supplementary and independent pharmacist prescribers. (From last month the team delivering the work of the NPC now forms the NICE Medicines and Prescribing Centre and sits alongside the clinical guidelines team within the institute’s Centre for Clinical Practice.)

The implementation of nurse and pharmacist independent prescribing has been evaluated and it is seen as generally safe and accepted by patients. Prescribing rights have recently been extended to allow pharmacist and nurse independent prescribers to prescribe schedule 2 to 5 Controlled Drugs (see Box, p158) and a recent Department of Health consultation proposed the extension of independent prescribing to physiotherapists and podiatrists.

However, recent evidence demonstrating the risk to patient safety associated with poor prescribing practice serves as a reminder to all prescribers of the need to maintain their prescribing competency. To continue supporting prescribers in this, the NPC has produced a single prescribing competency framework for use by all prescribers, regardless of their professional background.

**Why a single framework**

Although NPC prescribing competency frameworks were previously published on a profession-specific basis, the development process consistently made use of multidisciplinary expertise. Over time it became clear that a common set of competencies underpins prescribing regardless of professional background.

Indeed, patients should expect the same quality of care regardless of the professional background of the person prescribing for them. The single competency framework provides an outline of common prescribing competencies that, if acquired and maintained, can help all prescribers to become and remain effective prescribers in their area of practice.

**How it was developed**

The existing prescribing frameworks were consolidated and updated to produce a generic framework applicable for any prescriber — doctor, dentist or non-medical. This process was supported by a steering group with representation from across all the independent prescribing professions. The framework was validated by a focus group of existing prescribers from across the professional groups and patients. Its usability and implementation were tested by a second multidisciplinary focus group.

For supplementary prescribers several modifications and additions were made to the framework related to the nature of the supplementary prescribing partnership.

**The need for context**

The single prescribing competency framework is relevant to all prescribers. However, the framework should be interpreted in the context in which individuals are prescribing, taking into account their scope of practice. This means that the framework will be put into context by the different professional groups. For pharmacists this could mean that the framework is developed and adapted for prescribers practising in different clinical areas, for example paediatrics, intensive care or chronic disease management.

To support the framework’s dissemination and implementation, and to help put it into context, an external reference group of professional regulators, professional bodies, education providers and other stakeholders was established. Pharmacy representatives included the General Pharmaceutical Council and the Royal Pharmaceutical Society.

**Using the framework**

NPC prescribing competency frameworks have been validated repeatedly and used extensively in practice. The frameworks can be used to:

- Support continuing professional development of prescribers and help them identify strengths and areas for development through self-assessment, appraisal and structured feedback from colleagues
- Inform curricula and the development of the postgraduate training required by non-medical prescribers
Support staff development processes within organisations, including assessment of training needs and appraisal

Help healthcare professionals prepare to prescribe and provide the basis for ongoing education and development programmes and revalidation processes (eg, used as a framework for a portfolio to demonstrate prescribing competency)

Provide professional organisations or specialist groups with a basis for the development of levels of prescribing competency (eg, from recently qualified prescriber through to advanced prescriber)

Framework design
The competency framework sets out what good prescribing looks like. There are three domains, each containing three dimensions of competency (nine in total). Each of the nine dimensions contains statements which describe the activity or outcomes prescribers should be able to demonstrate. The figure on p157 illustrates the structure of the framework.

The framework has been published with tips to support its use. A Microsoft Word version of the competency statements is also available for users to add comments or evidence about how they can demonstrate they have achieved each area of competency.

The framework can be found at www.npcs.nhs.uk/improving_safety/improving_quality/resources/single_comp_framework.pdf.

References

On 23 April 2012, pharmacist and nurse independent prescribers were given the authority to independently prescribe schedule 2 to 5 Controlled Drugs. The new single competency framework can be used to assess and demonstrate prescribing competency in this new area.

This is particularly relevant because CDs comprised the therapeutic group responsible for the greatest number of patient safety incidents causing death or severe harm reported to the National Reporting and Learning System between 2005 and 2010. The following competencies are particularly relevant to prescribing CDs.

Competency statement 3
(in the “knowledge” dimension of the “consultation” domain)
Understands the mode of action and pharmacokinetics of medicines and how these mechanisms may be altered (eg, by age, renal impairment), and how this affects treatment decisions

Pharmacist prescribers should ensure that they are up to date with any dosage adjustments that may need to be made for any CDs they intend to prescribe

Competency statement 4
(in the “knowledge” dimension of the “consultation” domain)
Understands the potential for adverse effects and how to avoid/minimise, recognise and manage them

Demonstration of each of these competencies (4 and 42) may include reference to National Patient Safety Agency alerts related to CDs, eg, dosing errors with opioids

Competency statement 42
(in the “safe” dimension of the “prescribing effectively” domain)
Keeps up to date with advances in practice and emerging safety concerns related to prescribing

Pharmacists should be familiar with the legal requirements for CD prescriptions, but this can be assessed to confirm

Competency statement 47
(in the “safe” dimension of the “prescribing effectively” domain)
Writes legible, unambiguous and complete prescriptions which meet legal requirements

Prescribers of CDs should know how and when to report medication incidents involving CDs to the appropriate CD accountable officer

Independent prescribing of Controlled Drugs

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(in the “knowledge” dimension of the “consultation” domain)
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Demonstration of each of these competencies (4 and 42) may include reference to National Patient Safety Agency alerts related to CDs, eg, dosing errors with opioids.

Competency statement 42
(in the “safe” dimension of the “prescribing effectively” domain)
Keeps up to date with advances in practice and emerging safety concerns related to prescribing

Pharmacists should be familiar with the legal requirements for CD prescriptions, but this can be assessed to confirm

Competency statement 47
(in the “safe” dimension of the “prescribing effectively” domain)
Writes legible, unambiguous and complete prescriptions which meet legal requirements

Pharmacists should be familiar with the legal requirements for CD prescriptions, but this can be assessed to confirm

Competency statement 50
(in “professional” dimension of the “prescribing effectively” domain)
Knows and applies legal and ethical frameworks affecting prescribing practice (eg, misuse of drugs regulations, prescribing of unlicensed/off label medicines)

Prescribers of CDs should know how and when to report medication incidents involving CDs to the appropriate CD accountable officer