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Foreword

One of the defining characteristics of a profession is competence. Although other traits such as timeliness, accountability, integrity, responsibility, and effective communication skills are important, competence is a fundamental requirement. As society’s medication-use experts, pharmacists must have high levels of competence. Because of the complexity of the medication-use process, professional practice standards, and regulatory requirements, pharmacists practicing in hospitals and health systems must have exceedingly high levels of expertise and competence. Schools of pharmacy and residency training programs provide health-system pharmacists with an educational platform for entering practice; however, additional orientation and training in the work setting are crucial to their ability to practice safely and effectively.

In the past, orientation and training of new pharmacy staff consisted of a tour of the department and facility, a review of the policy and procedure manual, and hands-on training in the sterile products area with the computer system. But as pharmacists have become more engaged in direct patient care with collaborative drug therapy management protocols and expectations for involvement in patient safety initiatives and stewardship activities (e.g., antimicrobial, antithrombotic, opiate), comprehensive training and orientation have become necessities. Development of such orientation and training materials can be labor intensive and time consuming. The availability of standards-based competency assessment tools to assist organizations with the evaluation of their staff’s orientation will improve the consistency of the organization’s efforts and reduce the need to develop and maintain these resources.

ASHP’s Pharmacy Competency Assessment Center (PCAC) e-tool has been developed to be such a resource. Lead editors Drs. Joel Hennenfent and Heather Pace have tapped into the expertise of eight section editors and more than 80 expert authors to create 54 competencies over a wide variety of important topics. This resource covers a broad array of pertinent operational and clinical topics, distilling them into easily understood portions. Each module provides a thorough, well-referenced review of the topic, competency checklist, and model exam questions. The topics range from basic pharmacy calculations to specialty pharmacy patient care and educational services. This resource provides pharmacists with a tool that would take many hours to assemble within one’s own health system.

ASHP’s PCAC e-tool will have many potential applications in health-system pharmacy departments and beyond. Obviously, it will be a great resource to use for the orientation and training of new staff or as a refresher course for existing staff or pharmacists wishing to re-enter the workforce. The PCAC format may be used to illustrate how to structure and conduct training programs for pharmacy residents. The comprehensive list of topics covered and valuable checklists may serve as useful additions to introductory pharmacy practice experience (IPPE) and advanced pharmacy practice experience (APPE) student rotations, allowing them to self-direct their learning. The format of this e-tool will allow preceptors to laser-focus on developing the learner’s patient care skills. Finally, this will serve as a useful resource for pharmacy technicians, especially those looking for expanded roles.

Nearly two decades ago, William Zellmer observed “Health-system pharmacy is a distinctive area of pharmacy practice. Pharmacists in this area of practice have unique professional needs.” In creating ASHP’s PCAC e-tool, Hennenfent and Pace are providing the health-system pharmacy profession with a resource that will help support the unique needs of our practitioners as they strive to provide competent care.


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The Pharmacy Competency Assessment Center (PCAC) e-tool is designed to assist pharmacy leaders with competency management and to provide the efficient and effective competency training for pharmacy team members to deliver high-quality care to patients. To this end, the PCAC Advisory Board, a group selected from leading health systems and academic organizations across the United States, targeted key competency topics considered meaningful in today’s hospital environment. The PCAC e-tool is a key resource and how-to guide that includes more than 50 modules from over 80 expert authors, thereby providing the depth and breadth necessary to meet your competency needs while promoting the cornerstones of high-performing team members: positivity, engagement, and competence.

The PCAC Advisory Board created the e-tool to assist your organization in:

• Providing continuing education (CE)
• Adapting the competencies to meet accreditation standards, compliance (e.g., USP <797>), and documentation
• Expanding the roles for pharmacists and pharmacy technicians
• Ensuring competency in specialized patient populations (e.g., pediatrics, nutrition support, pain management, psychiatry, suicide prevention)
• Orienting and training new staff or staff in new roles
• Assisting with meeting credentialing and privileging medical staff privileges Ongoing Professional Practice Evaluation (OPPE) and Focused Professional Practice Evaluation (FPPE) processes

The components of each module include the following:

• Learning objectives
• Introduction
• Core content
• Conclusion
• Competency checklist
• Self-assessment exam and answers

Users of the PCAC e-tool should read the module and take the associated exam to ensure individual competency in a particular area, which is important for staff professionals. Examples of some key areas included in the tool are age-specific aptitude, hazardous waste management, pediatric oncology, parenteral nutrition, medication management, specialty pharmacy, USP <797>, and USP <800>.

Leaders will want to utilize the e-tool to reduce their team members’ workload and the time necessary to develop high-quality resources for competency development and assessment. The time required to create competencies of this quality is monumental, and that time could be repurposed toward delivering patient care. Additionally, the users are able to claim ACPE-accredited CE credits for completed modules and meet department competency expectations at the same time.

Our hope is that the PCAC e-tool will be an asset to your organization and that your team members will find it valuable in their daily clinical and operational responsibilities.

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