

Long-Term Care Survey Alert

Competency Assessments: Use 6 Tips to Improve How You Gather Assessment Feedback

Give the best possible care to your patients and residents.

Don't get caught in a rut. Do you feel like you are drowning in competency assessments? If you're properly monitoring whether clinical staff have the skills to perform their jobs, you have a lot of paperwork on your hands. Use these tips to streamline the process and stay on top of the work.

What is a Competency Assessment?

This is a process to protect your patients by assuring that no staff member does anything of importance until it is verified that they can do it properly. And, this is periodically reassessed to ensure that they have not slipped. Competency must be assessed by staff members who understand the skills and knowledge required by the job responsibilities, according to Joint Commission guidelines.

There are three categories for competency assessments.

1. Verifying licenses and other credentials at the hiring stage.
2. Providing orientation and an overview of basic qualifications.
3. Conducting ongoing competency assessments.

Align Assessments With Job Tasks

Competencies need to grow and change over time. Just as people and processes do not stay the same, neither do competencies.

Problem: Often times, health care organizations will design competencies to satisfy outside regulatory agencies such as the Joint Commission. This can cause these competencies to become 'static.' Your competency assessments should assure that you are giving the best possible care to your patients, residents, and other customers and, at the same time, shining in your surveys from outside agencies.

Additionally, assessment must be thorough and focus on the particular competency needs for the clinical staff's assignment. Use of a self-assessment, such as a skills checklist, as the sole assessment method does not constitute a competency assessment. Competency assessments are not about completing a bunch of checklists.

If your competency assessment process is loaded with checklists, you are probably measuring many things that focus only on technical skills, and you are likely missing the assessment of critical thinking and interpersonal skills.

Solution: Identify what needs your attention now. Have the courage to examine your processes in a thoughtful, critical manner. Rather than trying to create a huge, comprehensive list of skills required for each job and then trying to check them off each year, try to focus on the elements that truly relate to competency assessment success.

Apply 6 Tips to Refine Your Process

The competency assessment can be accomplished through a variety of methods, including information from current and previous employers, peer feedback, verifying certification and licensure, reviewing test results with a written or oral competency, and observation of skills.

Close adherence to the six aspects of meaningful competency assessments will assure that your assessments work for you, your employees and your clients. They are as follows:

1. Select competencies that are directly related to patient care and to internal staff communication.
2. Select the right verification methods for each competency identified. For example, you could use a software program that allows your facility to customize its verification methods. It would provide three methods of verification for the requisite competencies: a case study verification group; delivering a presentation with evidence of performance criteria; or submitting an exemplar of specified area with evidence of performance criteria. The manager can then confirm that one of the three verifications was met and is also able to track and monitor progress within the program software files.
3. Clarify accountability of the manager, educator and employee in the competency process.
4. Utilize an employee-centered verification process (where the employee has choices from a selection of verification methods).
5. Identify what is a competency problem and what is not.
6. Promptly and effectively address competency deficits and employees' problems once they are identified.

By creating a competency that has all six components, your competencies will be smaller and more meaningful. You will see that you can assess many skills in daily work, and you will even learn how you can use competency assessments up and down the organizational ladder.

Even if you leave out one of the core six aspects, you can still impair an organization's ability to move forward with strong, safe, effective, health care services. For example, if you put everything in place to assess the competency, but never follow through with the problematic employees, you will eventually create an environment that sends the message, "Don't bother to comply; they never do anything about if it you don't."

Gauge Your Success With Three Elements

The three areas of success that will lead to a very positive outcome are:

1. Collaborate on how you identify competencies. They are reflective of the dynamic nature of work.
2. Keep your verification methods employee-centered.
3. Use your leaders to create a culture of success with a dual focus. Focus on the organizational mission and on supporting positive employee behavior.

Use Your Competencies to Shape Your Facility's Culture

Competencies, by nature, shape the environment in which they are used. Your environment can either be functional or dysfunctional, depending on how the assessment process is implemented and perceived. If your competency assessment process is inefficient and perceived as ineffective and a redundant waste of time, it will serve to create a more dysfunctional environment. However, if meaningful, it will be perceived as a tool that helps to ensure efficient, effective care and will make the environment more functional.