

**Operationalizing Competence Concepts for Certification and Licensure**  
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### Panelists

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- John Wickett, Ph.D.  
Wickett Measurement Systems Inc.
- Denise Fandel, CAE, MBA  
National Athletic Trainers' Association  
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### Preamble

- The public expects that licensed and certified professionals are required to maintain competence.
- Systematic thought on construct definition for continuing competence is just beginning and needed for development of theory.

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## Preamble

- Consensus of research on effectiveness of continuing education is that it does not bring about continuing competence.
- Assessment and self assessment have been found to enhance relevance of continuing competence programs to participants.

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## Preamble

- Some evidence shows that enhanced continuing education (with assessments) is effective.

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## Objectives

- Present the concepts and terminology of continuing competence as well as a framework for measurement.
- Describe the implementation steps for creating a continuing competence program.
- Summarize the application of these concepts through a case study.

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## Terminology

- Maintenance of Proficiency [College of Family Physicians of Canada]
- Professional Development Program, Continuing Professional Excellence, Continuing Professional Development [Various Engineering associations across Canada]
- Practice Assessment [College of Physiotherapists of Ontario]
- Continuing Education [Financial Planning Standards Council]

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## Terminology

- Continuing Competence
  - The ability to provide service at specified levels of knowledge and skill, not only at the time of initial certification but throughout an individual's professional career. [Certification: The ICE Handbook]
  - The ongoing commitment of the individual to integrate and apply the knowledge, skills and judgment with the attitudes, values and beliefs required to practice safely, effectively and ethically in a designated role. [Nursing Call to Action 2010]

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## Terminology

- Continued Competence
  - Past activities which demonstrate that throughout a specified time period, and at a level at least equivalent to the minimal requirements for a particular level of certification/licensure, the candidate has integrated and applied the knowledge, skills and judgment with the attitudes, values and beliefs required to practice safely, effectively and ethically in a designated role and setting. [Nursing Call to Action 2010]

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## Terminology

- We all desire a program that promotes and encourages continuing proficiency, at a minimum.
- We measure what has already happened though . . . We measure that competence has continued at least up to the time of measurement.

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## Terminology

- Continuing v. Continued
  - Continuing implies the present and future.
  - Continued implies the past and present.
  - Words matter: the choice of term sets a temporal expectation.

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## Terminology

- Competence v. Competency
  - Competence speaks to the underlying capacity to perform at a specified level.
  - Competency refers to the demonstration of behaviour and is influenced by many factors.
  - Words matter: the choice of term sets the scope of expectation.

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## Terminology

- Ideal goal of most certification and licensure programs:
  - Competence that continues into the future.
- But, what do most programs actually measure?
  - Competency that has continued up to today.
  - Not necessarily wrong, but is it enough? And how does the measurement influence the practitioners?

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## Methods Used to Demonstrate Continuing Competence

- Activities
  - Academic Coursework
  - Independent Study
  - Research and Professional Writing
  - Presentation and Instruction
  - Professional Meetings and activities
  - Mentorship
  - Active employment
- Periodic recertification/re-licensure by exam

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## Methods Used to Document Continuing Competence

- Self-Assessments
- Enhanced CE - Assessments
- Employment - Actively Engaged
- Peer Reviews and References
- Portfolios

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**Measurement in Continuing Competence  
Programs and Standards that Apply**

**Self-Assessment**

- Checklist, such as critical safety issues or common skills
  - Guided self-reflection, often based on practice area, client type, or conditions
  - Short tests focused on specific topics
- Not measures, per se, this kind of device leads to goals set by the individual.

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**Measurement in Continuing Competence  
Programs and Standards that Apply**

- Enhanced continuing education (Continuing education courses that require passing an end-of-activity assessment)
- Relatively in-depth training in a specific topic or skill with credit based on passing an end-of-course assessment

Curricular validity, psychometrics determined to address stakeholder expectations.

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**Measurement in Continuing Competence  
Programs and Standards that Apply**

- Work products (e.g., portfolios)
- Case analyses
- Supervisory evaluations and/or references

Job relatedness, psychometrics related to subjective scoring (e.g., interrater consistency, passing standard).

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### Measurement in Continuing Competence Programs and Standards that Apply

#### Reexamination

- Periodic requirement to pass the entry-level examination
- Periodic requirement to pass examination whose purpose is to support renewal decision making

These are high stakes tests that must adhere to rigorous psychometric standards.

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### NCCA Standards

#### Standard 19

The certification program must require periodic recertification and establish, publish, apply, and periodically review policies and procedures for recertification.

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### Standard 19 Essential Elements

- The basis and purpose for recertification and all recertification requirements must be published.
- The rationale for the recertification time interval must be included in the policy.
- Recertification policies and procedures ...must be published and made available to certificants and the public.

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## NCCA Standards

### Standard 20

The certification program must demonstrate that its recertification requirements measure or enhance the continued competence of certificants.

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### Standard 20 Essential Elements

- If the purpose of recertification is to **measure** continued competence of certificants, then the certification program must substantiate the validity and reliability of the assessment instruments used to measure continued competence.

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### Standard 20 Essential Elements cont'd

- If the purpose is to **enhance** continued competence of certificants, then the certification program must demonstrate how the policy contributes to professional development of the individual certificants.

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### ISO 17024 Standards

**9.6.1** The certification body shall have (a) documented procedure(s) for implementation of the recertification process, in accordance with the certification scheme requirements.

**9.6.2** The certification body shall ensure during the recertification process that it confirms continued competence of the certified person and ongoing compliance with current scheme requirements by the certified person.

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### ISO 17024 Standards

**9.6.3** The recertification period shall be based upon the scheme requirements. The rationale for the recertification period shall take into account, where relevant, the following:

- a) regulatory requirements;
- b) changes to normative documents;
- c) changes in the relevant scheme requirements.

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### ISO 17024 Standards

**9.6.3 (cont'd)** The recertification period shall be based upon the scheme requirements. The rationale for the recertification period shall take into account, where relevant, the following:

- d) the nature and maturity of the industry or field in which the certified person is working;
- e) the risks resulting from an incompetent person;
- f) ongoing changes in technology, and requirements for certified persons;
- g) requirements of interested parties;
- h) the frequency and content of surveillance activities, if required by the scheme.

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## ISO 17024 Standards

9.6.4 The selected recertification activity/activities shall be adequate to ensure that there is impartial assessment to confirm the continuing competence of the certified person.

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## ISO 17024 Standards

9.6.5 In accordance with the certification scheme, recertification by the certification body shall consider at least the following:

- a) on-site assessment;
- b) professional development;
- c) structured interviews;
- d) confirmation of continuing satisfactory work and work experience records;
- e) examination;
- f) checks on physical capability in relation to the competence concerned.

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## Implementation

- Whether implementing a brand new continuing competency program, or revising an existing one, there are steps to be followed that will increase the probability of success.

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## Implementation

- Define purpose
  - This is the most important and most overlooked step.
  - The purpose should be specific and endorsed by key stakeholders.
  - If done well, it will guide the decisions that must be made regarding policies and implementation of those policies.

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## Implementation

- Establish budget, time line, and team
  - Follow sound project management practices.
  - Do not underestimate the project.
- Establish communication plan
  - Prepare early for later releases.
  - The packaging will influence reception.

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## Implementation

- Draft/Revise policies
  - Set requirements consistent with level of performance dictated by competency profile.
  - Fairness and rigour are key here.
  - Plan for the exceptions.
- Validate policies
  - All who are impacted should get to voice their opinion.
  - Consider public exposure period.

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## Implementation

- Gain endorsement/ratification as necessary
  - When working across provincial or state borders, this can be time consuming and often the greatest challenge.
  - Keep the right people involved along the way.
  - If Board of Directors approval is necessary, consider having a Board member involved in the development process.

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## Implementation

- Build/Modify infrastructure for program
  - Prepare changes to databases, user interfaces, and websites.
  - Prepare new documentation and modify existing documentation.
- Launch program
  - Make sure the front lines are in the know.
  - Once live, check everything again.

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## Implementation

- Measure and refine
  - How do you know if you were successful?
  - Project management metrics are useful, but really the point of the implementation was to make a positive change in how effectively your professionals work with their clients.
  - Do not expect perfection out of the gate . . . Implement, observe, identify improvements in a continuous cycle.

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## Case Study

It all started with a question in an editorial.

“Once Certified Always Competent?”

J Athl Train. 2000 Jan-Mar; 35(1): 17-18.

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## Board's question

*Does continuing education maintain entry-level competence among ATs?*

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## Starting Point



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## 2002

- Board initiates task force.
- Task force recommends a longitudinal study.
- Study questions are developed.

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## Major Research Questions

- Among approved providers (APs) in Category A, what proportion of offerings is in each of the professional domains?
- What factors affect the selection of continuing education?
- What factors are associated with maintaining or enhancing competence?
- Does using the Personal Learning Plan (PLP) assist in maintaining competence among athletic trainers?

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## Final Question

Does continuing education maintain entry-level competence among ATs?  
- Evaluation - comparison of self-assessment and results of an examination

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### Gaps, Flaws and Inconsistencies

- There is no clearly articulated theory of continuing competence.
- Lack of robust measures of on-the-job performance makes it hard to understand effectiveness of program components.
- Role of assessment(s) in continuing competence programs varies across disciplines.

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### Gaps, Flaws and Inconsistencies

- Legislation often does not impose continuing competence as part of the licensure process.
- Raising the bar on requirements to maintain credentials is often met with resistance.
- Participation in continuing competence programs is resource intensive, raising the question of who will pay, and how.

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## Gaps, Flaws and Inconsistencies

- Natural specialization in practice makes it hard to develop a one-size-fits-all approach.

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## Conclusion

The art and science of continuing competence programs is not yet at a desirable state. Nonetheless, the issue is of such importance to the integrity of your credential that we encourage all licensure and certification organizations/program to:

- 1) develop programs where none exist, or
- 2) evaluate whether your existing program is sufficiently rigorous and fits its purpose.

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## Resources/References

GO TO: [www.credentialingexcellence.org/clear](http://www.credentialingexcellence.org/clear)  
for copy of ICE documents

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### Questions?



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