




Comhairle na nDochtúirí Leighis
Medical Council

PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCE

Promoting Quality Assurance





The Medical Council has prepared this booklet to provide an overview of information for doctors about professional competence. It has been produced to help answer questions in relation to the maintenance of professional competence. Please be aware that this is not a definitive guide and that it will be revised as the process is developed and more information becomes available. Every effort has been made to ensure that it is correct, however no liability whatsoever is accepted by The Medical Council, its servants or agents for any errors or omissions in the information contained in this booklet or for any loss occasioned to any person acting or refraining from acting as a result of any statement in this booklet.

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Foreword

The Medical Council welcomes the introduction of statutory professional competence requirements as a key part of ensuring the maintenance of professional competence for all registered medical practitioners in Ireland.

Maintaining professional competence on a formal basis is now a statutory requirement and has many benefits; it will help to ensure that all doctors maintain their level of knowledge and skills, will benefit from the knowledge and expertise of other health professionals and will help to ensure that patients are getting high quality care. This represents an important development for the medical profession, for health service employers and for the general public. While the majority of doctors have maintained their professional competence on a voluntary basis for many years, this process is now formalised into a quality assurance process that enhances the patient-doctor relationship.

Since 2002, there has been a concerted drive by the Medical Council to develop professional competence schemes and formulate guidelines and procedures to ensure doctors maintain their knowledge and skills, thereby reinforcing public trust in the medical profession. The past eight years has seen a high level of acceptance of this initiative by the profession and a gathering of momentum for the introduction of statutory professional competence despite the initial lack of supporting legislation.

The Medical Council acknowledges the effort and commitment shown by the following Committees and Working Groups;

- Professional Development Committee
- Professional Competence Schemes Working Group
- Forum of Irish Postgraduate Medical Training Bodies
- Professional Competence Steering Committee

The Council appreciates that a co-ordinated approach is necessary in order to better promote patient safety and quality of patient care. The Council is confident that the 12 months lead in time from commencement of Part 11 of Medical Practitioners Act, 2007 will give sufficient time for all parties' preparatory work to be finalised, thereby establishing a quality assurance framework that will reinforce public trust.

Professor Kieran C Murphy

President

Professional Competence at a glance

A quick overview of professional competence and what it means for doctors


- All registered medical practitioners must participate in professional competence schemes.
- Doctors will have 1 year, until 1 May 2011, to enrol in a professional competence scheme and engage in professional competence activities.
- The Medical Council will develop a number of professional competence schemes in which doctors can participate. Initially, these schemes will consist of two main elements: Continuous Professional Development (CPD) and Clinical Audit.
- These schemes will be run through the Postgraduate Training Bodies (PGTB)
- Proposed minimum credits required are:
 - 50 credits per year
 - 250 credits per five year cycle
- It is proposed that all doctors should engage in clinical audit and at a minimum participate in one audit exercise annually. It is recommended that doctors spend at a minimum one hour per month in audit activity.

- CPD activities may include regional and national scientific meetings, conferences, workshops, personal learning and international conferences organised by equivalent bodies in other countries. For more information on recording CPD for your specialty please contact your Postgraduate Training Body.


Registered Medical Practitioners



Advise Medical Council of your registration with a PGTB

- Complete Doctor Survey 2010 - online or questionnaire recently sent in post
- 

Enrol with Professional Competence Scheme

- Contact your PGTB for further details
 - If you are not registered with a PGTB, contact the PGTB you feel most suitable to your area of practice
- 

Engage in Professional Competence Activities

- Continuous Professional Development (CPD)
- Clinical Audit

Introduction to Professional Competence



Professional Competence Schemes

Professional competence schemes are the formal structures provided for under Part 11 of the Medical Practitioners Act, 2007 (the Act) - Maintenance of Professional Competence - to ensure that all doctors registered and working in Ireland maintain their knowledge and skills at an acceptable level. While the term “professional competence schemes” is new, many of the activities that the schemes will involve are already in existence. For example;

- Evidence of continuing professional development (certificates, courses attended etc.)
- Details of research and publications
- Validated evidence of participation in teaching, lecturing and management
- Results of clinical audit and peer review
- Certified copies of log books and other training records
- Evidence of appraisals/assessments from trainers and colleagues
- Results of multi source feedback including 360° feedback

Professional competence schemes will provide a formal structure for recording and documenting participation in such activities.

Timescales for introducing Professional Competence

The commencement of Part 11 of the Act, on 1st May 2010 means that all registered medical practitioners in Ireland are obliged to maintain their professional competence and by 1st May 2011 they must be formally enrolled in a professional competence scheme. In reality, this means that doctors must engage in CPD and clinical audit activities as part of a recognised professional competence scheme.

Duty of Employers

The Act sets out the duty of the employer in relation to the maintenance of professional competence of registered medical practitioners. Part 11 Section 93 (1) & (2) states that “An employer of a registered medical practitioner shall facilitate the maintenance of professional competence of registered medical practitioners pursuant to a professional competence scheme applicable to the practitioners concerned”.

Failure to participate in Professional Competence Schemes

Under the Act, any doctor who refuses to co-operate, fails to co-operate or ceases to co-operate with requirements under the Act to participate in professional competence schemes will be the subject of a complaint to the Medical Council. The Council is empowered to respond in a number of ways, including bringing the matter before the Council’s Fitness to Practice Committee.



Professional Competence Schemes



Professional Competence Schemes in detail

The Medical Council will develop a number of professional competence schemes in which doctors can participate. PGTBs are currently developing specialty specific professional competence schemes to be submitted to the Medical Council for approval. Initially, these schemes will consist of two main elements: Continuous Professional Development (CPD) and Clinical Audit. It is intended that at a later date Multi-Source Feedback will become an element of the schemes.

Continuing Professional Development (CPD)

Practitioners will be enrolled in CPD activities as defined by the relevant PGTB for that specialty and will be required to submit evidence of their participation in educational activities. All schemes will be based on an overall proposed framework as set out below, which largely specifies minimum requirements. However this framework is subject to change and will allow for variability across the schemes depending on the specialty specific requirements.

Proposed framework of minimum requirements

- 50 credits per year
- 250 credits per five year cycle

Categories:

- External – 20 credits per year minimum
- Internal – 20 credits per year minimum
- Personal Learning – five credits minimum
- Research or Teaching – two credits per year desirable

Accumulated credits must be balanced (i.e. evenly spread) within the five year cycle. Practitioners are encouraged to balance credits by the 30 month mark.

Credits will generally be calculated as one credit for one hour of activity. However PGTBs may be able to deviate from this guideline provided they are able to provide the Medical Council with a rationale to support their specific arrangements.

All CPD activities must be documented and each practitioner will be required to maintain a logbook of activities.

Typical CPD activities

As a general rule, educational activities that are sponsored by PGTBs will automatically generate CPD points. These will include regional and national scientific meetings, conferences, workshops, personal learning and international conferences organised by equivalent bodies in other countries. The PGTBs are responsible for attributing CPD points to various professional activities. For more information on recording CPD for your specialty please contact your Postgraduate Training Body.

Examples of documentation:

- Local/National/International meetings
- Attendance certificates

- Medically Related Advanced Degrees –
copy of diploma or final transcript

- Research - Copy of published article's title page

- Poster Presentation - Copy of page from
conference proceedings that lists the poster
abstract and identifies the presenter

- Postgraduate Trainer/Examiner/Question
Setting - Confirmed by relevant PGTB

- Personal Learning: Self-documented

Clinical Audit

Clinical audit is defined as the “systematic review and evaluation of current practice with reference to research based standards [and designed] to improve patient care”. The setting of standards, the measurement of practice compared to a ‘gold standard’, the identification of deficiencies and addressing deficiencies (closing the loop) are the accepted components of clinical audit.

Under the proposed framework, all registered medical practitioners will actively engage in audit and at a minimum, participate in one audit exercise annually that relates directly to their area of clinical practice. It is recommended that practitioners spend at a minimum one hour per month in audit activity.

Clinical audit is recognised as having three elements:

- 1.** Measurement – measuring a specific element of clinical practice
- 2.** Comparison – comparing results with the recognised standard (in circumstances where comparison is possible)
- 3.** Evaluation – reflecting on outcome of audit and where indicated, changing practice accordingly

Multi-Source Feedback (MSF)

This is a process of gathering information about a doctor from a range of colleagues, other members of the healthcare team, trainees, managers and patients, it is sometimes referred to as a 360° assessment. Multi-source feedback is not required as a component of professional competence schemes at this time. Its introduction will be reviewed following the evaluation of two Medical Council pilot exercises to determine its reliability, validity, acceptance and cost.

Frequently Asked Questions



I am not aligned to any Postgraduate Training Body. How can I get aligned to one?

If you are not aligned to any PGTB, you should contact that PGTB which you consider to be most relevant to your area of clinical practice. You need not necessarily be a member of a PGTB to participate in its professional competence schemes. If you have any difficulty in aligning with a PGTB please contact the professional competence Section of the Medical Council at 01-498-3136 or pc@mcirl.ie.

I am not a member of a particular PGTB and don't particularly want to join.

You may not have to become a full member of a PGTB to align with them for purposes of professional competence. This situation is currently under review and you may simply need to enrol for the purposes of administration of your professional competence scheme. However, under Part 11 of the Act the onus is on the doctor to maintain his/her professional competence.

What if I do not complete enough CPD credits within a year?

Under the proposed framework, doctors should complete an equivalent of 50 credits of CPD activity every year. If you have not completed, or cannot complete 50 credits in a year, the Medical Council is developing processes that will consider whether the reason for not completing the required credits is sufficient in the circumstances. This matter is currently under discussion within the Medical Council and the Professional Competence Steering Committee.

I only work part-time. Do I still have to fully participate in a professional competence scheme?

Yes. Even if you only work part-time you must provide evidence of full participation in a professional competence scheme.

I am on the Medical Council Register and work in Ireland occasionally for a few weeks a year. Do I need to maintain my professional competence?

Yes, if you are on the Medical Council Register, even if you are only working in Ireland occasionally you will need to participate in professional competence schemes and must provide evidence of full participation in relevant activities. In accordance with Part 6 Section 50 (1) of the Act, there will be a small number of European Economic Area (EEA) doctors who are only granted temporary registration because they are providing only temporary and occasional services in Ireland (usually just a few days or weeks a year). An example might be a visiting academic. Under European Commission law we cannot oblige this group of doctors to participate in professional competence. However, if the services provided ceased being temporary and occasional and they became established here in Ireland, then there would be a requirement to fully comply with professional competence schemes. If you are an EEA doctor and are uncertain about your registration status, you should contact the Medical Council for further advice.

I don't treat patients but would like to remain on the Register?

The requirements for professional competence will be the same as for your other colleagues on the Medical Council Register. While you may not be treating patients you will still be required to demonstrate that you are maintaining your competence to the appropriate standards for the area in which you are working. If you have been out of a specific field of practice for a significant length of time and are considering a return to clinical practice then you may wish to contact the relevant PGTB/ Faculty to see what additional support it can provide in helping you to re-enter that field of practice.

What if my specialty is not recognised by any of the PGTBs?

There are a number of specialty/sub specialties that are not aligned to any particular PGTB. It may be possible for you to align to a PGTB for the purpose of administration of professional competence schemes. This matter is currently under discussion within the Medical Council and the Professional Competence Steering Committee.

What if I am on maternity leave/sick leave/extended leave?

You may apply to your PGTB to have your CPD cycle extended for up to one year. Extensions of longer than that may require you to undergo a period of retraining and/or an assessment of your clinical competence prior to you resuming practice. This matter is currently under discussion within the Medical Council and the Professional Competence Steering Committee.

What if I am retired? Can I retain my name on the Register?

Retired doctors who are no longer in active practice may wish to consider voluntarily withdrawing from the Medical Council Register. Should your circumstances change you could apply for it to be restored. If you wish to maintain your name on the Medical Council Register you will be required to participate in professional competence schemes and must provide evidence of full participation in CPD activities.

Further information



Further information about professional competence schemes

We try to keep the information on the professional competence section of the website up to date with the most recent information on the development of the schemes. If you have any questions relating to professional competence schemes that are not answered here, you can contact:

By post: Medical Council,
Kingram House,
Kingram Place,
Dublin 2

By telephone: 01 498 3136

By email: pc@mcirl.ie

Website: www.medicalcouncil.ie



Medical Council

Kingram House

Kingram Place

Dublin 2

T. + 353 1 498 3100

W. www.medicalcouncil.ie