

Chapter 5

Continuing Competence

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Professional Competence

Competence is defined by the *Health Professions Act (HPA)* as “the combined knowledge, skills, attitudes and judgment required to provide professional services”¹². In this context, competence is more than the knowledge and skills directly related to dietetics; it is also more than the accomplishment of discrete and isolated tasks. Competence involves the interaction and integration of knowledge, critical thinking, judgment, attitudes, skills, values and beliefs. It includes the ability to generalize learning and apply knowledge from one situation to another.

As professionals, Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists have an obligation to ensure that they are competent in their practice throughout the course of their career. Remaining competent in the ever-changing field of dietetics means that Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists must continuously learn and apply the most current evidence-based research and information in their practice. Whether a Registered Dietitian or Registered Nutritionist is entering a new area of practice, returning to the work force or continuing to practice in their same position, as a professional, they are obligated to ensure

¹² Province of Alberta. *Health Professions Act*, R.S.A. 2000, c. H-7. s. 1(1)f.

that they are competent in their practice. Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists who fail to remain competent may place the safety of their clients at risk. They also risk becoming the subject of a complaint or lawsuit and may lose their job.

Professionals who are competent demonstrate the following actions and behaviours in their practice (1):

- They use and apply up to date knowledge and skills
- They make sound decisions based on appropriate data
- They communicate effectively with clients
- They evaluate their own practice
- They improve their performance based on self-reflection, applied practice and feedback from others

KEY PRACTICE POINT

Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists have an obligation to ensure that they are competent in their practice throughout the course of their career.

The requirements for maintaining competence in the practice of Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists in Alberta are stated in the *Code of Ethics* and the *Standards of Practice and Essential Competencies for Dietetic Practice*. The *Code of Ethics* is a set of principles of professional conduct which establishes the ethical expectations that Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists are required to adhere to in their professional practice. (Please refer to Appendix 2 for the *Code of Ethics*.) In relation to competence, the *Code of Ethics* states the following:

“4.0 Maintains competence in dietetic practice.

4.1 Personal Competence

- (1) The dietitian is knowledgeable of and adheres to all relevant public protection legislation applicable to their dietetic practice including but not limited to: health profession legislation, protection of persons in care legislation, child welfare legislation, protection of information and privacy legislation.
- (2) The dietitian assumes responsibility and accountability for personal competence in practice.
- (3) The dietitian acquires new skills and knowledge on a continuing basis to ensure safe, competent and ethical dietetic practice.
- (4) The dietitian practices dietetics based on scientific principles and current evidence-based practice.
- (5) The dietitian practices within the scope of practice, the limits of their qualifications and their own level of competence.

- (6) The dietitian consults or makes referrals as appropriate when a situation is beyond their level of competence.
- (7) The dietitian accepts only those responsibilities which they are competent to perform. If the dietitian is asked to assume responsibilities beyond their present level of competence, the dietitian acquires additional information, knowledge or skills prior to assuming the responsibilities or declines to accept them.”¹³

The *Standards of Practice and Essential Competencies for Dietetic Practice* describes the standards and essential competencies that must be met by all Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists practicing in Alberta. (Please refer to Appendix 3 for the *Standards of Practice and Essential Competencies for Dietetic Practice*.) Standard 3 states that in their practice a Registered Dietitian or Registered Nutritionist “Maintains competence in dietetic practice and the provision of professional services”¹⁴. The related essential competency and performance indicators that specifically address the requirements for maintaining competence are as follows:

“10.0 Maintains professional competence.

- 10.1 Reflects on and evaluates own current practice.
- 10.2 Assesses quality of services provided and identifies opportunities for improvement.
- 10.3 Recognizes limitations in practice qualifications and own level of competence.
- 10.4 Identifies professional competence goals.
- 10.5 Engages in activities to gain new knowledge, skills and behaviours to meet professional competence goals.
- 10.6 Applies new knowledge, skills and behaviours to practice.”¹⁵

Continuing Competence Program Requirements

Under the *HPA*, the College of Dietitians of Alberta (the College) has the legislated responsibility to establish, maintain and enforce standards for the continuing competence of its members (3). In meeting this responsibility, the College has a Continuing Competence Program (CCP) in place to monitor the ongoing competence of members and enhance the provision of professional services. The CCP is designed to ensure that regulated members of the profession remain competent and provide safe, ethical services that meet or exceed professional standards, thereby protecting the public.

¹³ College of Dietitians of Alberta. *Code of Ethics*; 2007.

¹⁴ College of Dietitians of Alberta. *Standards of Practice and Essential Competencies for Dietetic Practice*; 2007.

¹⁵ College of Dietitians of Alberta. *Standards of Practice and Essential Competencies for Dietetic Practice*; 2007.

KEY PRACTICE POINT

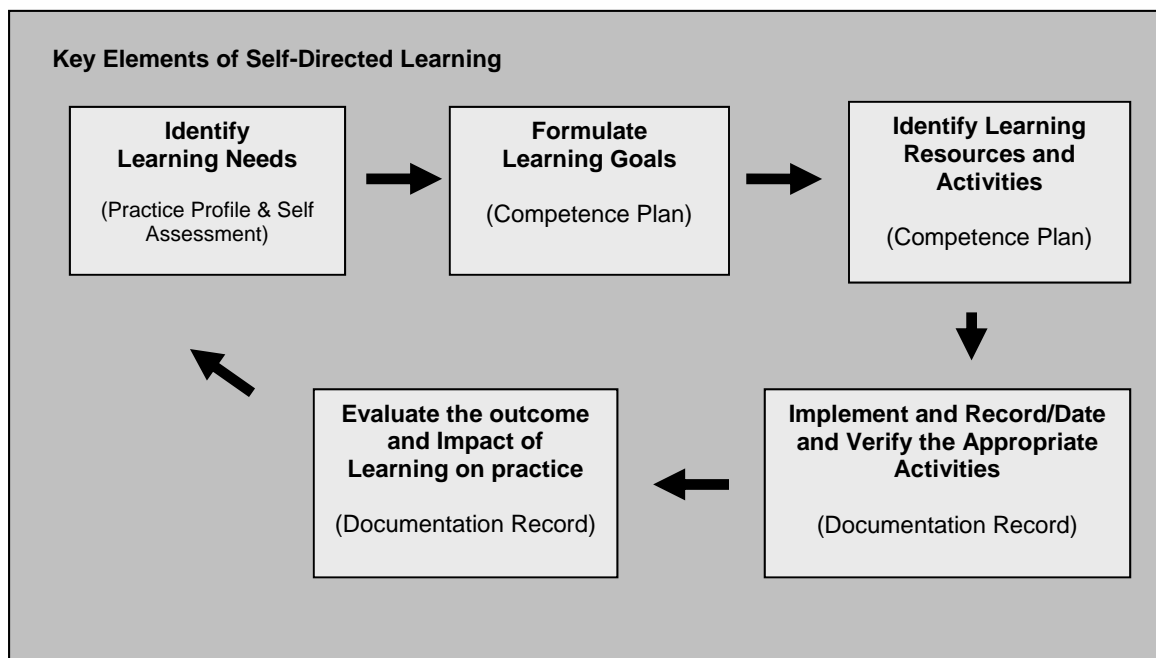
All Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists are required to participate in the Continuing Competence Program of the College each year in order to maintain their registration with the College and obtain their practice permit.

It is a legislated requirement that all Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists participate in the CCP of the College regardless of employment status. The *HPA* requires that regulatory colleges link the renewal of practice permits to meeting the requirements of the CCP. When completing their application for renewal forms each year, Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists are required to make a declaration that they have participated in the CCP during the previous year.

NOTE: New Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists who are entered on the General Register of the College on or after October 1st of each year are not required to participate in the CCP until the following CCP year.

The College of Dietitians of Alberta Continuing Competence Program

The CCP of the College is built on a foundation that is based on an extensive review of competence models used by a variety of professions. It focuses on maintaining professional competence based on the *Standards of Practice and Essential Competencies for Dietetic Practice*. The CCP also applies principles of adult learning theory and contains the following key elements of self-directed learning:



The CCP was created to be adaptable, allowing members to reflect on competence as it relates to their unique practice, work environment and learning style. The program was also designed to integrate with employer quality assurance programs and performance management systems. The CCP is flexible, outcome based and designed to support the

professional growth and development of members in a way that enhances their career and personal goals.

The CCP of the College is made up of the following components (4):

Part 1 - Practice Profile

The Practice Profile allows members to define their current practice focus / areas of expertise and identify the trends, challenges and developments affecting their practice. Completion of the practice profile enables members to complete the appropriate self assessment tools, thereby helping them to focus their learning on activities that relate to their practice.

Part 2 – Self Assessment

The Self Assessment is designed to help members identify learning needs by assessing their practice and competence in relation to the *Standards of Practice and Essential Competencies for Dietetic Practice*. Completion of the self assessment tool will assist members in identifying their learning needs relative to specific performance indicators and in documenting opportunities to develop various aspects of their practice.

Part 3 - Competence Plan

The Competence Plan requires members to formulate competence goals and identify the resources and activities needed to achieve the identified goals. Members also indicate how their practice has been affected or enhanced through completion of their Competence Plans.

Completion of Continuing Competence Program requirements must be entered online during registration renewal prior to March 31. In order to obtain their practice permit, members must meet the following requirements of the CCP:

- Completion of Continuing Competence Plan 1 and Continuing Competence Plan 2, each including a learning goal based on a specific performance indicator, the types of competence activities achieved and evaluation of outcome / reflections on impact to practice online.
- Completion of a Continuing Competence Plan, as above, for each Restricted Activity (if applicable) online.
- Identification of at least two learning goals for the upcoming year based on performance indicators, as identified from completion of the Self-Assessment within the CCP Workbook found online. An additional learning goal for each Restricted Activity (if applicable) is also required.

Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists who are not working in dietetic practice (i.e. those who are working outside of the Practice Statement of the Profession) may focus Competence Plan 1 (from Standards 1 – 3) on *Competency 11: Acts as a reliable source for current food and nutrition information*. This competency contains aspects that are unique to any professional who has earned the Registered Dietitian and Registered Nutritionist designation and therefore must be maintained.

Detailed instructions for completion of the CCP along with samples of completed programs are available in the competence section on the member side of the College website at www.collegeofdietitians.ab.ca. Reviewing the sample forms that have been provided will assist members in successfully completing their CCP requirements.

Competence Activities

In their practice, Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists typically participate in various activities that facilitate their ongoing professional development. The CCP enables members to formalize, reflect on, and report these activities to the College.

The range of activities that can be undertaken is wide and varied. It is recommended that members choose a variety of competence activities, suited to their learning style and the goals that they have set. Learning activities that are the most beneficial to maintaining professional competence are those that focus on the *Standards of Practice and Essential Competencies for Dietetic Practice* and the member's unique practice.

Competence activities may include but are not limited to the following:

- Journal club / study group
- Courses / practical skills updates / returnship
- Case studies / rounds
- Networking / discussion groups
- Development / delivery of presentations
- Self directed research / literature reviews
- Conferences / workshops / in-services
- Job shadowing
- Consultation with other health professionals / peers
- Work with College / professional association

Members of the College may also be required to complete workshops or self-study modules from time to time as set out by the Council.

Documentation of Competence Activities

Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists must be able to verify their participation in activities related to their competence goals. Proof of attendance at events in the absence of other supporting documentation is not sufficient. Verification of activities might include but is not limited to combinations of the following:

- Course certificate / receipts and notes
- Notes from rounds / education sessions
- Listing of references / resources used and summary of findings
- Contact information for colleagues consulted and description of case or issue discussed
- Course outline or program and notes
- Copies of materials / presentations developed
- Meeting date(s), participant list and topic summary of journal club / study groups
- Summary of ideas generated with colleagues on an identified practice issue or problem
- Description of a case study, research or other finding that impacted your practice

KEY PRACTICE POINT

Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists are responsible for retaining records for the purpose of verifying their participation in competence activities. CCP and related documentation must be retained for a minimum of three years.

Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists must retain records to enable the College to verify their competence activities and outcomes and where this information is stored. All documentation must be kept current and available for review by the College. CCP and related documentation are to be retained by members for a minimum of three years.

Monitoring the Program

Maintaining the competence to practice dietetics is the responsibility of each member of the College; the CCP is designed to assist members in maintaining their competence. Under the *HPA*, the College has the legislated responsibility to monitor the effectiveness of the program and each member's participation in the program. Section 16(1) of the *Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists Regulation* states the requirements to “periodically select regulated members in accordance with the criteria established by the Council for a review and evaluation of all or part of the member’s continuing competence program”.¹⁶

¹⁶ Province of Alberta. *Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists Profession Regulation*, 2002.

In meeting this responsibility, the College has established a Continuing Competence Committee (CCC). The CCC completes regular reviews and/or audits of member CCP documentation to ensure compliance with the program and that a member's competence plan is effective in maintaining competence. The identity of each member is kept confidential during the review process.

The College will review each member's online continuing competence program submission at least once every three years, to ensure compliance with the program. Specifically, the College will assess the appropriateness of each reflection against the performance indicator, activities and evaluation, looking for demonstration in the reflection of:

- Identification of a learning goal, relative to the performance indicator selected
- An overview of activities undertaken and the new knowledge/skill acquired and applied in practice **and**
- How the goal influenced practice **and/or**
- How the member knows he/she is more competent in his/her practice **and/or**
- An example of feedback received (and from whom) that confirms the member's competence **and**
- Is written in the past tense (rather than expected future impact or use)

Further, 10% of members selected for online program review will be randomly selected for program audit each year. An audit includes a request from the College to submit CCP Workbook materials (including self-assessment, identification of goals, proposed activities and benefits to practice) or alternative documentation, in addition to documentation / verification of completed activities. Selected members will be required to submit materials to the College for review, and will also include a review of online Continuing Competence Program goals, activities and evaluations / reflections.

Members selected for audit will be notified in writing, and will be required to submit all Continuing Competence Program documentation, including verification of participation in learning activities as requested, and will respond to any questions from the College with respect to their competence program.

The evaluation criteria that will be used in an audit include:

- Continuing Competence Program Workbook is complete; if alternate documentation is provided, the submission must include demonstration of:
 - Practice Profile (page 4 of the Workbook)
 - Self-Assessment (pages 7-18 of the Workbook)
 - Areas selected for further development (Standards 1-3 page 11; Standards 1-7 page 18)
 - Competence Plans 1 & 2 Worksheets (pages 21 & 22); for each plan:
 - One performance indicator per Plan is noted
 - "What I would like to learn" is complete
 - Dates, description of activity, and description of verification complete (see Verification below)

- Evaluation: Reflection – benefit to practice checked off; reflection documented
- Self-Assessment of Restricted Activities and areas selected for further development, as appropriate (pages 24-28)
- Restricted Activity Competence Plans as appropriate (pages 29-32)
- Consistency between workbook activities/materials and online submission
- Verification of Activities:

The selected member must submit dated evidence of each documented activity, demonstrating that he / she has completed the activity within the continuing competence year. The activities should relate to the planned learning goal. The College will look for evidence of at least one of the following as verification for each activity:

- Samples of or references to a presentation, recommendation, new or revised material or program plan, etc
- Copy of certificate of attendance, copy of program, copy of receipt
- Reference lists with full citations
- Journal article citation
- Article/reading summaries
- Learning resources
- Notes from meetings/consultation with mentors, colleagues etc
- Other verification evidence may be considered appropriate on a case by case basis
- Review of online reflection based on above criteria

Non-Compliance with the Continuing Competence Program

The College provides direction to members when CCPs do not meet the established evaluation criteria. Members must undertake any additional actions related to their program as directed by the College. Failure to comply with the directions provided by the College may result in conditions on, suspension or cancellation of the practice permit.

Chapter Summary

The *Health Professions Act (HPA)* defines competence as “the combined knowledge, skills, attitudes and judgment required to provide professional services”¹⁷. As professionals, Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists have an obligation to ensure that they are competent in their practice throughout the course of their career. The requirements for maintaining competence in the practice of Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists in Alberta are stated in the *Standards of Practice and Essential Competencies for Dietetic Practice* and the *Code of Ethics*. Under the *HPA*, the College of Dietitians of Alberta (the College) has the legislated responsibility to establish, maintain and enforce standards for the continuing competence of its members. In meeting this responsibility, the College has a Continuing Competence Program (CCP) in place which is designed to ensure that regulated members of the profession remain competent and provide safe, ethical services that meet or exceed professional standards, thereby protecting the public. It is a legislated requirement that all Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists participate in the mandatory program of the College regardless of employment status. The *HPA* requires that regulatory colleges link the renewal of practice permits to meeting the requirements of the CCP. Under the *HPA*, the College has the legislated responsibility to monitor the effectiveness of the program and each member’s participation in the program. Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists are responsible for retaining records for the purpose of verifying their participation in competence activities. CCP and related documentation must be retained for a minimum of three years. The College provides direction to members when CCPs do not meet the established evaluation criteria. Failure to comply with the directions provided by the College may result in conditions on, suspension or cancellation of a member’s practice permit.

¹⁷ Province of Alberta. *Health Professions Act*; R.S.A. 2000, c. H-7. s. 1(1)f.

References

1. Epstein, RM, Hundert, EM. Defining and Assessing Professional Competence. *JAMA*. 2002; 287:226-235.
2. College of Dietitians of Alberta. *Standards of Practice and Essential Competencies for Dietetic Practice*; 2007.
3. Province of Alberta. *Health Professions Act*; R.S.A. 2000, c. H-7.
4. Province of Alberta. *Registered Dietitian and Registered Nutritionists Regulation*; 2002.