

## Chapter 5

# Continuing Competence

### CHAPTER OVERVIEW

- Professional Competence
- Continuing Competence Program Requirements
- The College of Dietitians of Alberta Continuing Competence Program
- Competence Activities
- Documentation of Competence Activities
- Monitoring the Program
- Non-Compliance with the Continuing Competence Program
- Chapter Summary
- Case Scenario
- Chapter Quiz
- References

## Professional Competence

Competence is defined by the *Health Professions Act (HPA)* as “the combined knowledge, skills, attitudes and judgment required to provide professional services”<sup>12</sup>. 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

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

continuing to practice in their same position, as a professional, they are obligated to ensure 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 competence at entry to practice are stated in the *Integrated Competencies for Dietetic Education and Practice*; the requirements for maintaining competence in practice of Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists in Alberta are stated in the *Code of Ethics*, the *Standards of Practice*, the *Standards of Practice: Sexual Abuse and Sexual Misconduct Prevention*.

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.”<sup>13</sup>

The *Standards of Practice* and the *Standards of Practice: Sexual Abuse and Sexual Misconduct Prevention* describe the standards 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 Appendix 4 for the *Standards of Practice: Sexual Abuse and Sexual Misconduct Prevention*). In relation to competence, Standard 6. Competence from the *Standards of Practice* states that in their practice,

“Registered Dietitians are responsible and accountable for their continuing competence in order to provide safe, ethical, professional services.

To demonstrate this standard, Registered Dietitians will:

- a) Provide professional services within the limits of their qualifications and personal level of competence.
- b) Evaluate their own practice and participate in continuing professional development to identify and address learning needs.
- c) Identify practice situations beyond their personal level of competence and consult, refer, and/or obtain further knowledge and skills to provide professional services.
- d) Maintain competence in present area(s) of practice, incorporating evidence into professional services.
- e) Acquire the knowledge and skills to practice competently in emerging practice areas as required.
- f) Comply with the CDA continuing competence program, adhering to all applicable legislative and regulatory requirements.
- g) Voluntarily withdraw from practice if they self-identify that they are no longer able to provide safe, competent, ethical services (e.g., illness, substance abuse).
- h) Comply with practice hour requirements as set out by CDA.
- i) Adhere to CDA requirements for practicing restricted activities.”<sup>14</sup>

The *Standards of Practice* are the basis for the Continuing Competence Program’s self-assessment tool, used annually to reflect on and set priorities for learning and development for the upcoming year.

<sup>13</sup> College of Dietitians of Alberta. *Code of Ethics*; 2007.

<sup>14</sup> College of Dietitians of Alberta. *Standards of Practice*, 2018.

## Continuing Competence Program Requirements

### 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.**

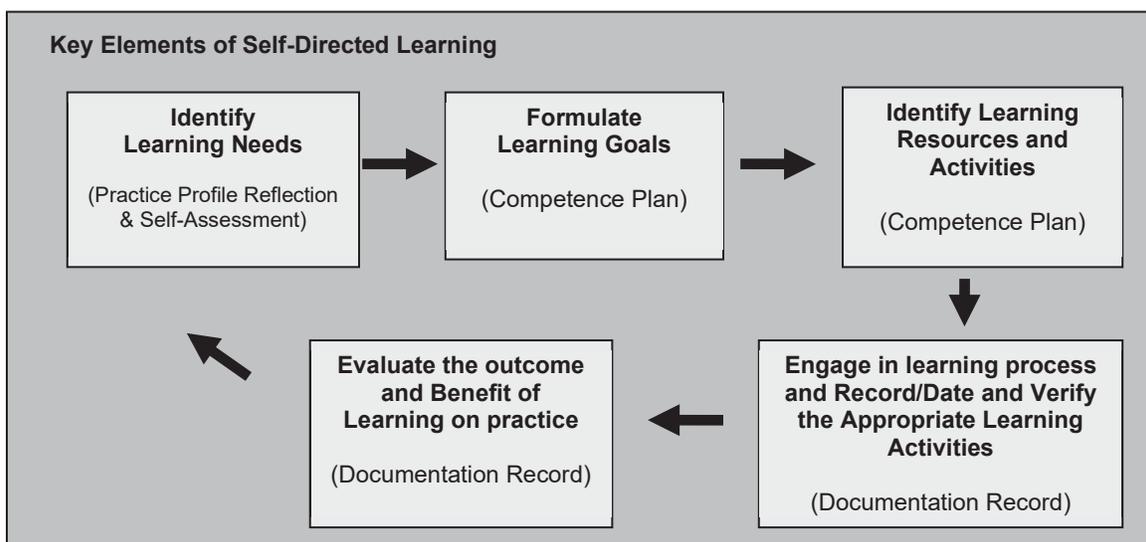
Under the *HPA*, the College of Dietitians of Alberta (the College) has the legislated responsibility to establish, maintain and enforce standards for the continuing competence of its regulated members (2). In meeting this responsibility, the College has a Continuing Competence Program (CCP) in place to monitor the ongoing competence of regulated 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.

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 1<sup>st</sup> of each year are not required to participate in the CCP until the following CCP year.

## The College of Dietitians of Alberta’s 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 profession’s *Standards of 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 regulated 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 regulated members in a way that enhances their career and personal goals.

The CCP of the College is made up of the following components (3):

### ***Part 1 - Practice Profile Reflection***

The Practice Profile Reflection allows regulated 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 reflection prior to the self-assessment enables regulated members to focus their learning on activities that relate to their practice and interests.

### ***Part 2 – Self-Assessment***

The Self-Assessment is designed to help regulated members identify learning needs by reflecting on their practice and competence in relation to each indicator in the *Standards of Practice*. Completion of the self-assessment tool will assist regulated members in identifying their priority learning needs relative to specific indicators.

### ***Part 3 - Learning Plans***

The Learning Plan Worksheets require regulated members to formulate learning goals specific to the indicators chosen as priorities, to identify why each is important to their practice, to anticipate the benefit to their practice, to log and date completed learning activities, and location of verification materials, and reflect on learning and benefit to practice/competence enhancement.

Completion of Continuing Competence Program requirements must be entered online during registration renewal prior to March 31. In order to obtain their practice permit, regulated 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 completed and benefit to practice, and reflections on impact of learning on 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.

Please note that all dietitians must choose two priorities for learning (plus restricted activities, as applicable) from any of the fifteen *Standards of Practice*, in a given year. Dietitians are not required to choose a learning priority related to their area of practice; however, goals and activities can be catered to supporting specific areas of practice. The Practice Profile Reflection becomes important in justifying unique practice settings and positions and therefore learning needs.

Detailed instructions for completion of the CCP along with samples of completed programs are available on the Continuing Competence section on the For Dietitians section of the College website at [www.collegeofdietitians.ab.ca](http://www.collegeofdietitians.ab.ca). Reviewing the sample forms that have been provided will assist regulated 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 regulated 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 regulated members choose a variety of competence activities, suited to their learning style and the goals that they have set. Learning activities that are most beneficial to maintaining professional competence are those that focus on enhancing the regulated member's unique practice.

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

- Journal club / study group
- Courses / practical skills updates
- 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

Regulated 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 related 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 regulated members for a minimum of three years.

## Monitoring the Program

Maintaining the competence to practice dietetics is the responsibility of each regulated member of the College; the CCP is designed to assist regulated members in maintaining their competence. Under the *HPA*, the College has the legislated responsibility to monitor the effectiveness of the program and each regulated 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 regulated member's continuing competence program".<sup>15</sup>

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

The College will review each regulated 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, learning activities and benefit to practice, looking for demonstration in the reflection of:

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

Further, 10% of regulated 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 the completed Practice Profile Reflection, completed Self-Assessment and completed Learning Plan Worksheets identifying learning goals, learning activities and Reflection on learning) or alternative documentation, in addition to documentation / verification of completed activities. Selected regulated members will be required to submit materials to the College for review, which will also include a review of online Continuing Competence Program goals, activities and evaluations / reflections.

Regulated members selected for audit will be notified in writing and will be required to submit all Continuing Competence Program documentation and respond to any questions from the College with respect to their competence program.

The evaluation criteria that will be used in an audit is outlined below.

- Continuing Competence Program Workbook is complete, which includes the

---

<sup>15</sup> Province of Alberta. *Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists Profession Regulation*, 2002.

following:

- Part 1: Practice Profile Reflection and Professional Portfolio
  - Part 2: Self-Assessment against the *Standards of Practice*
    - Includes identified priorities for learning
  - Part 3: Learning Plans Worksheets; with the following completed for each plan:
    - Section A: Learning Goal, which includes *Standard #*, chosen indicator, Learning Goal, Benefit to Practice is noted
    - Section B: Learning Activities, which includes dates, description of activity, and confirmation of verification and location for each activity is noted
    - Section C: Reflection on Learning and Competence Enhancement; which includes reflection including the answers to the following questions: What was my learning goal? What activities did I complete? What did I learn? How has my practice been enhanced (or how am I more competent)?
  - Self-Assessment of Restricted Activities and identified priorities for learning, as appropriate
  - Restricted Activity Learning Plans Worksheets, as appropriate
- Consistency between workbook materials and online submission
  - Verification of Activities:

The selected regulated member must submit dated evidence of each documented activity, demonstrating that they have 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, with a focus on including the answers to the questions.

## **Non-Compliance with the Continuing Competence Program**

The College provides direction to regulated members when their CCP does not meet the established evaluation criteria. Regulated 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”<sup>16</sup>. 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*, the *Standards of Practice: Sexual Abuse and Sexual Misconduct Prevention*, the *Code of Ethics*, and the *Integrated Competencies for Dietetic Education and Practice*. 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 regulated 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 regulated 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 regulated members when their CCP does 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 regulated member’s practice permit.

---

<sup>16</sup> Province of Alberta. *Health Professions Act*; R.S.A. 2000, c. H-7. s. 1(1)f.

## Case Scenario 5.1

GG was so excited. It was the beginning of May, and after 3 years in practice as an RD, she was taking a 10 month leave to travel. She arrived back to Alberta the following March, returning to her previous position. Upon her return, she realized that her registration renewal with the College was due. She found her Continuing Competence Program (CCP) information and referred to the documents to complete the necessary Competence Plan submissions within the online registration renewal forms; she was able to submit her renewal prior to the deadline. When GG's CCP was randomly selected for an audit and her documentation was provided to the College office, it was noticed by the Continuing Competence Committee that GG had simply written "Not Applicable – Not Working" across each page and included the same within her online submissions.

### Case Scenario 5.1 Questions

1. Has GG met the requirements of the Continuing Competence Program? Explain your answer.
2. Has GG met her obligation to ensure that she remains competent in her practice?
3. What are the risks involved in the way in which GG addressed her continuing competence program during her leave?
4. What would you recommend if you were on the Continuing Competence Committee?

## Chapter Quiz

1. All of the following statements are true **except** for the following:
  - a) Competence is defined by the *Health Professions Act* as “the combined knowledge, skills, attitudes and judgment required to provide professional services”.
  - b) Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists who fail to remain competent in their practice risk becoming the subject of a complaint or a lawsuit.
  - c) It is the responsibility of the College of Dietitians of Alberta and employers to ensure that Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists are competent in their practice.
  - d) Requirements for Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists related to maintaining competence are stated in the *Standards of Practice*, the *Integrated Competencies for Dietetic Education and Practice* and the *Code of Ethics*.
  
2. Under the *Health Professions Act*:
  - a) The College of Dietitians of Alberta has the legislated responsibility to establish, maintain and enforce standards for the continuing competence of its regulated members.
  - b) Participation in the Continuing Competence Program of the College of Dietitians of Alberta is mandatory for all Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists.
  - c) The College of Dietitians of Alberta is responsible for monitoring the effectiveness of the program and each regulated member’s participation in the program.
  - d) All of the above
  - e) Answers a and b only
  
3. All of the following statements are true **except** for the following:
  - a) The Continuing Competence Program of the College of Dietitians of Alberta includes a Practice Profile Reflection, Self-Assessment and Learning Plan Worksheets.
  - b) Under the *Health Professions Act*, meeting the requirements of the Continuing Competence Program is linked to obtaining one’s practice permit.
  - c) Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists are responsible for retaining Continuing Competence Program and related documentation for one year.
  - d) All of the above
  - e) Answers a and b only
  
4. Failure to comply with the requirements of the Continuing Competence Program of the College of Dietitians of Alberta may result in:
  - a) conditions being placed on a practice permit
  - b) suspension of a practice permit
  - c) cancellation of a practice permit
  - d) All of the above
  - e) Answers a and b only

## References

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