LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. *Review the meaning of "competency" and how technical application is measured against quality expectations.*

2. *Explain the responsibility of Sterile Processing professionals to assess department processes and proficiencies.*

3. *Identify when remediation is necessary, and which evaluation categories can be used to create a remediation plan.*

Sponsored by:

3M Health Care

Education nation: create core competencies

by Sarah B. Cruz

The Sterile Processing (SP) profession is more than just instrument focused, it is patient safety driven. While SP professionals are a key component of the infection prevention process, they are also tasked with responsibilities away from the assembly tables, outside of the department, and even throughout the healthcare facility. Needless to say, it is nearly impossible to capture the entire scope of duties within the character limits of a job description. Being certain that specific criteria and job skills are met consistently is part of the SP department's quality management system. This is done both formally and informally by SP and operating room leadership, department culture, and even the longest standing team members. Department workflow is determined through standard operating procedures, standard works, and best practices. To ensure that "how we've always done it" is actually creating the outcome the patient must have, competencies come into play.

From massive healthcare systems that dominate geographic locations to the smallest eye care center in the middle of nowhere, competencies are utilized in some capacity within Sterile Processing departments. The word "competency" is often referred to when quality is discussed, referred to, or even called into question. When a competency comes to mind, we think of a one- or two-page checklist that is used to prove proficiency throughout all the areas of the department or a new piece of equipment. Revisited sometimes yearly or before a surveyor's site assessment, this document attests that all processes in the department are performed effectively and yield the desired outcomes. That is a lot of expectation to put on a single document. So what happens when the quality outcomes are not what we expect them to be?

What are "Competencies"?

Before a "near miss" in the operating room or a patient safety event occurs, let us pull the competency conversation all the way back to the beginning. Competencies, as a business tool, were formally introduced in the mid 1980's. Around the time that Dr. John J. Perkins was advocating for the centralization of reprocessing medical instruments,[1] an approach to enhance organizational performance was being introduced to companies throughout the United States.[2] Their primary purpose was to determine if a worker had the ability to do something successfully and efficiently. Over time, competencies would evolve to define the necessary skills and talent requirements as well as outline individual performance improvements to align with the definitions of "effective" and "successful" as determined by the organization. In the past, the weight of these expectations was left to the job description. The job description would only list the tasks and baseline skills necessary to qualify for the position, not the type of professional you would become.

With the introduction of competency evaluations, workplace leadership is able to assess success while in the real-world work environment. No longer relying on a "you have it or you don't" mentality, competencies evaluate how a task is performed and consider the multiple factors that contribute to the desired outcome. Utilizing competencies contributes to the streamlining of talent development, encourages best practice, and creates measurable results. Today, competencies have been integrated into the recruitment, development, quality management, succession planning, and retention programs of many organizations.[3]

Supporting Quality Management

Competencies are to be used as a process evaluation tool. Process evaluation is a key component of assuring that a quality management system (QMS) is effective. During competency evaluations, we observe the process that we anticipate the SP professional will follow. Evaluation, by definition, is the determination of condition by appraisal and study. Therefore,

competency evaluations are not detailed instructions on how the process needs to be done, but rather the assessment of the process being performed. The processes being evaluated during competency assessments are trained through department standard operating procedures (SOPs) and standard works. Hence, competencies should result in the affirmation that the department's QMS is being taught and adhered to effectively.

Competencies also demonstrate proficiency. To be proficient is to demonstrate an advanced understanding in a branch of knowledge. Assessments and tests are two ways that proficiency is typically evaluated. Although these words are often used interchangeably, they are utilized differently. An assessment is used to test the value and effects of a process, typically through real time instances. Testing is when something is put through a series of trials to determine its value⁶. Therefore, if our competencies resemble a checklist or a quiz, these are competency tests, not evaluations. The limitation to this approach is that it merely states whether or not our SP professional has value. The importance of creating competencies that mirror assessments is the ability to observe our SP professionals carrying out the department's QMS as a whole. It evaluates the technician's professional development as a result of department onboarding, training, and education.

Conducting Assessments

The key component to competency assessments is that they are performed during real-time observations. They were designed to demonstrate how the task should be performed in a real-life work environment. This is what makes them different from a job description. If there has ever been a moment of frustration surrounding a work performance review that offered no solutions or process improvement recommendations, there is a strong chance that competencies were either underutilized or not utilized at all. Competencies provide leadership and team members the opportunity to discuss important issues with actionable outcomes and they are provided with exact areas in need of improvement. A competency assessment in itself is just a document, however. The ability of the document and the measurable outcomes it produces directly correlate to the proficiency of the professional administering it: the competency of the competency administrator.

Method of Instruction: How is is being taught?		Validation
A Audio	**D** Demonstration	Can the professional perform the anticipated processes that result in the desired result? Are they proficient?
V Video	**R** Review/ Research	

Method of Verification: How is comprehension demonstrated?		Remediation
E Explanation	**DO** Direct Observation	Will the professional need a remediation plan?
RD Return Demonstration	**DV** Documentation Verification	

Area the Competency Covers — **Purpose of Competency**: *List why or the frequency the competency is being performed? Yearly review? New hire? Retraining? New equipment?*

	Method of Instruction	Method of Verification	Proficient Y/N	Remediation	Initials / Date
What are some important factors that we would assess?				Create a note/ observation that recognizes improvement or success	
Competency recognizes actions. Write areas of assessment in present tense instead of in question form.					Who/ When is this being observed?
What processes do they need to be able to perform in order to achieve proficiency?				Create a note/ observation that recognizes improvement or success	
Will they need to explain any documents?					
Are there any standards or definitions they must know in order to be successful?					
There can be as many items listed					
Remember: The longer the document, the longer it takes to complete the assessment					
Assess the components of the competency and be sure they stay focused on the area listed.					

Please list any additional comments, concerns, and/or remediation processes below.

Detailed remediation plans or areas of success can be written here.

NOTE: *The individual's learning and comprehension style and preference will contribute to overall perception and impression of proficiency. If they are having issues, consider utilizing the variety of methods of instructions and verification.*

Remediation plans are the action areas we are asking the professional to improve in. These will become the tangible and measurable ways we determine retention and application in improvements.

Manager Signature:	Date:
Educator Signature:	Date:
Employee Signature:	Date:

Example Competency Assessment document
Download: https://hpnonline.com/53027334

Competencies typically fall on the responsibility of the SP department manager. The effectiveness of a competency assessment is directly correlated to the time available to dedicate to them. Depending on the size of the department and the number of areas it supports, this may or may not be feasible for an SP manager to conduct such assessments on their own. As a solution, this task can be delegated to another SP professional such as an educator, preceptor, or even shift lead. The most important determinations to make when selecting a candidate are:

• Are they able to carry out the process as expected? Are they teaching "our way" or the way "they do it"?
• Are they honest? Can they write what they see as it is?
• Do they have integrity? Can they observe their colleagues objectively and assess process administration without bias?
• Do they understand the goals of a competency and how to correctly fill out the document?

Document Anatomy

A competency test and assessment differ in document style. A competency test typically looks like a quiz, very similar to the one at the end of this lesson. The reader will take the quiz and either demonstrate that they have comprehended the information or not. A competency document that looks like a checklist also produces the same results as a test. It demonstrates whether or not the SP professional is sound in their practices. There are a few components that need to be added to a competency to make it an assessment.

Remember, the goal of an assessment is to test the value and effects of a process, typically through real time instances. Please look at the sample document provided in this lesson (previous page). It defines areas that lend to the ability to assess rather than test. Keep in mind that competency documents are printed on paper and not etched in stone. They are meant to be revisited and revised for accuracy, attainability, and feasibility. Competencies should be reviewed for accuracy whenever new SOPs are created and/or standard works are revised.

Successful Competencies

A successful competency effectively highlights and celebrates areas of proficiency and subject matter expertise, also known as conscious compliance with department processes. It also provides a clear indication of not only where remediation is needed but also how to educate or train

the professional in the area by highlighting nonconscious compliance and nonconscious noncompliance. We will be able to effectively determine where management may need a sterner approach by documenting conscious noncompliance on these assessments, as well.

Because the goal of a competency is to assess the overall proficiency and performance of the SP professional, remediation and education are now also successful outcomes of the competency program. Remediation plans can be drafted as a result of this. These plans are created to address the various reasons why proficiency was a concern in an area. The concerns can typically be separated into groups that require one to three of the following actions to correct certain behaviors.

Retraining:
1. The base comprehension is present, but the execution is not correct.
2. Review the steps of the process necessary to achieve the outcome.
3. Teach the "how" of the process.
4. Directly observe, return demonstration, and review at a later date to assess retention.

Education:
1. The technical execution is correct but executive decision-making skills are lacking due to incomplete information.
2. Provide the educational materials necessary for comprehension.
3. Teach "why" we carry out the process.
4. Return explanation and review at a later date to assess retention.

Intervention:
1. The base comprehension is not present due to lack of training, skills, and/or education.
2. Be aware of learning and comprehension style.
3. Teach "from scratch," like it is being learned for the first time and ask open-ended questions to confirm interpretation of material.
4. Return explanation, directly observe, return demonstration, review at a later date to assess retention.

As the SP professionals evolve, competency assessments become even more important in assuring that we are providing the support necessary to their professional development, our department's retention program, and the facility's succession planning. This is good measure and preventative planning for the known fact that the Sterile Processing industry is always growing and evolving. New instruments will be created, revolutionary surgical procedures will

change lives, and regulations will pass and go into effect. It is safe to say that because of these factors, the duties of the SP professional will not be the same as the day they began working in the field.

It is easy to assume the competencies are the be-all and end-all of the training and quality programs within a Sterile Processing department. However, they are only one part of the overall quality management system. Effective competencies are preceded by SOPs and standard works. Successful competencies encourage best practices and contribute to workplace culture. The robust duties and expectations of an SP professional cannot be left to a mere checklist. Whether or not a competency will be proven to be effective lies in its creation, implementation, evaluation, and change management. Competencies can also demonstrate what is or is not working in the quality management system the department has put into place to evaluate their team with. SP competencies can be utilized to develop, train, and retain the talent necessary for the succession planning in our organizations and industry. Most importantly, competencies ensure that our patients can return to their lives after surgery. **HPN**

References:

1. Perkins, John J. Principles and Methods of Sterilization in Health Sciences. 2nd ed., Charles C Thomas Pub Limited, 1983.

2. Twin, Alexandra. "Coe Competencies in Business: Finding a Competitive Advantage." Investopedia, Dotdash Meredith, 9 Sep. 2022, https://www.investopedia.com/terms/c/core_competencies.asp.

3. "What Are Competencies?" YouTube, uploaded by HRSG, 3 Dec. 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cmJVjfwvmxA

4. "Evaluate." Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, Merriam-Webster. https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/evaluate. Accessed 15 Feb. 2023.

5. "Proficiency." Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, Merriam-Webster https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/proficiency. Accessed 15 Feb. 2023.

6. "Difference between Assessment and Testing." DifferenceBetween.info, Difference Between https://www.differencebetween.info/difference-between-assessment-and-testing. Accessed 15 Feb. 2023.

7. "Acceleration vs. Remediation vs. Intervention: What's the Difference?" Edmentum.com, Edmentum Inc., 24 June 2021 https://blog.edmentum.com/acceleration-vs-remediation-vs-intervention-whats-difference

Sarah B. Cruz, CSPDT, CRCST, CHL, CIS is president and founder of PRETREAT CSS, where she and Sterile Processing professionals work together to create objective-driven goals to advance their professional development. She is an industry speaker, published writer, social media enthusiast, mentor, and CTSPA Chapter President and HSPA Director. Sarah is a Sterile Processing instructor at her local community college and a CS Quality Education Program Development Coordinator in her full-time role.

CONTINUING EDUCATION TEST • APRIL 2023

Education nation: create core competencies

Circle the one correct answer:

1. **Tests and assessments are the same thing.**
   A. True
   B. False

2. **Competencies are only one of the components to a department's quality management systems (QMS?**
   A. True
   B. False

3. **Competencies do not need to be reviewed or revised after their initial creation.**
   A. True
   B. False

4. **A remediation plan is made up of:**
   A. Retraining
   B. Education
   C. Intervention
   D. All of the above
   E. None of the above

5. **Competencies are less effective when performed in real time.**
   A. True
   B. False

6. **Competencies contribute to:**
   A. Talent development
   B. Best practices
   C. Measurable results
   D. All of the above
   E. None of the above

7. **SP managers are the only personnel capable of performing a competency.**
   A. True
   B. False

8. **Competencies outline areas of improvement and celebrate areas of subject matter expertise.**
   A. True
   B. False

9. **Competencies only need to be performed before a surveyor visit.**
   A. True
   B. False

10. **Competency checklists and competency assessments are the same thing.**
    A. True
    B. False

CONTINUING EDUCATION TEST SCORING

HEALTHCARE PURCHASING NEWS EDUCATION HUB

HPN is thrilled to now offer all CEU quizzes online by scanning the QR code on the right or visiting: https://educationhub.hpnonline.com.
The cost to take the quiz online remains at $10.

Due to rising costs if you would like to mail in your completed quiz using the method below the price is now $50 for each test taken.

Request for Scoring

❑ I have enclosed the scoring fee of **$50 for EACH test taken** — payable to **Endeavor Business Media**. We regret that no refunds can be given. (It is not neccessary to submit multiple tests separately.)

Detach exam and return to:
Continuing Education Division
Healthcare Purchasing News
2477 Stickney Point Road, Suite 221B
Sarasota, FL 34231

HSPA | HEALTHCARE STERILE PROCESSING ASSOCIATION   CBSPD

The approval number for this lesson is **3M-HPN 230603.**

FLOWCODE   PRIVACY.FLOWCODE.COM