

Competence Assessment Tools for Health-System Pharmacies (2nd edition)

Lee B. Murdaugh. American Society of Health-System Pharmacists, Bethesda, Maryland, 2003.

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Over the past several decades, hospital pharmacy practice has become increasingly regulated. Hospital pharmacy departments must routinely undergo accreditation to ensure that they are providing safe and effective patient care services and, in some cases, to ensure staffing and infrastructure are sufficient to provide adequate education for pharmacy students and other trainees. Pharmacists, managers, and directors are well aware of the stress and turmoil that often precedes accreditation reports and site visits. Such events frequently require completion of self-assessment questionnaires, submission of documents (such as policy and procedure manuals), and measurement of the efficacy of existing or new services. While few would argue with the goals of accreditation or its necessity, many pharmacists preparing for accreditation may express concern about their skills and abilities to fully deal with reviewers' needs or anticipate their concerns.

Competence Assessment Tools for Health-System Pharmacies (2nd edition) by Lee B. Murdaugh provides pharmacists in institutional settings with an opportunity to evaluate their processes, staff, and initiatives systematically and comprehensively. Originally developed to help pharmacy directors and staff meet the accreditation standards of the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (Joint Commission), this manual includes a series of templates, resources, job descriptions, and other tools that may assist facilities and practitioners preparing for accreditation.



Although the Joint Commission's mandate is only for American health care facilities, the general principles described in this manual are also relevant to pharmacists in Canada.

Competence is defined in this manual as "the condition or quality of being well-qualified, fit or capable". Murdaugh clearly establishes the need to contrast competence with more static measures (including educational attainment or experience). Throughout the manual, the need to demonstrate competence through action, rather than by simple reliance on traditional indicators, is clearly emphasized. Numerous competence assessment tools are presented, conveniently subdivided according to pharmacy-practice specialty. Of particular interest are tools that may be used to assess the competence of pharmacy technicians, for instance in technician-checking-technician distribution systems.

Instruments for assessing competence in areas as diverse as pediatrics, geriatrics, psychiatry, and oncology are provided for evaluating the skills of pharmacists working with special patient populations. Each instrument consists of a variety of cases and questions, frequently in multiple-choice or short-answer formats. While such assessments are common and seem to possess adequate face validity, broader competence issues are left to clinical-observation report forms that are also included in the manual.

When taken together, the written and performance-based assessment instruments provided in this manual are clear and comprehensive reflections of hospital pharmacy practice, both in Canada and the United States. Despite the author's explicit mandate to provide support for pharmacy directors facing Joint Commission accreditation, the tools developed are broadly applicable to the practices of most institutional pharmacies. It is unclear, however, exactly how such tools

could best be applied in the Canadian context. From one perspective, the manual consists of nothing more than a series of tests and assessment forms, similar to those frequently found in structured undergraduate pharmacy practical-experience programs for senior-level students. Additional information related to the development of policies, procedures, and job descriptions is thorough and systematic, but an overall picture of how to assess competence at a departmental level (as opposed to an individual-practitioner level) is somewhat lacking.

This manual may be of interest to pharmacy administrators facing accreditation and to those interested in providing staff pharmacists with opportunities for self-assessment and professional development. As a tool for preparing for accreditation within Canadian health care facilities, this manual could be an important complement to existing tools and processes. It also provides an interesting and clear review of key areas of pharmacy practice within institutions. The software version of the assessment tools described (but not reviewed), which may be of interest to some, would allow for more permanent documentation of the measurement of competence. Overall, *Competence Assessment Tools for Health-Systems Pharmacies* may be a useful tool for some practice settings, despite its emphasis on American accreditation standards.

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