

HEADS UP...

TOPIC: Credentialing and Competency Assessments

SETTING: Behavioral Health Care (BHC) Programs



Why is this important?

Credentialing is a process that verifies the qualifications (education/training/experience) and legitimacy of healthcare professionals (e.g., licensure/certification). This is used to ensure that individuals served receive care by those whose education, training and clinical ability meets a certain level of proficiency. Comparatively, competency assessments in healthcare are used to ensure that healthcare providers can consistently demonstrate the appropriate knowledge, skills, and behaviors necessary to work efficiently and effectively in a clinical setting. In order to provide individuals served with the highest level of care, proper credentialing and competency evaluations are both essential processes in establishing that healthcare professionals are held to the same standards.

Scope of the problem:

Time period: **January 1, 2019 – March 31, 2020**

Number of full surveys performed: **1,380**

Number of surveys with moderate to high risk SAFER findings related to credentialing and competency assessments (**HRM.01.02.01 EP 1 and HRM.01.06.01 EP 3**): **193 (14%)**

Observations identified within a specific topic area may reveal systemic areas for improvement across the organization, which might be reflected in additional standards/EPs within the HRM chapter and/or other chapters/standards/EPs.

Standards requiring specific competencies for treating specific population and providing specific services are listed under the CTS chapter and can be identified based on the standards applicability grid in the standard applicability process chapter. See also CTS.02.04.19 CTS.05.04.13, CTS.05.06.05.

Sample survey observations [from surveyor notes] (and contributing factors)

- There was a lack of or delay in primary source verification for staff licensure at either the time of hire, renewal or expiry (e.g., staff member was hired but no credentialing was completed until the following year).
- HR indicates that an initial assessment of competence is part of the 90-day orientation process. There was no documentation of this initial competency assessment for a staff member hired 6 months ago.
- Competency evaluations that were present did not correlate to job descriptions or align with core responsibilities

Potential contributing factors:

- Competencies not defined in job description of staff
- Competencies not defined for specific population, services and settings
- Organization does not assess competencies when the job duties and responsibilities change
- Unclear policies or processes regarding competency assessment and/or credentialing
- Unclear who is responsible for performing or documenting staff credentialing and/or competency assessments.
- Competency and/or credentialing processes are incomplete or inadequate.

How to identify potential problems in your organization

Review your policies and procedures

- Has the organization defined competencies for all staff based on the settings, services and population served?
- Does the organization have clearly defined processes for credentialing and competency assessments?
 - How does the organization perform primary and secondary source verification? (e.g., direct correspondence, telephone verification, or internet verifications).
 - What sources are used to verify education, training, and licensure?
 - What guidelines are used to assess core competencies?
 - How often are competencies/credentials assessed?
 - How does the organization ensure that credentialing and competency assessments meet all regulations and requirements?
 - How are these processes documented?
- Who is responsible for performing credentialing? For competency assessments?
 - Does your organization use a credentials verification organization (CVO)? If so, how do you evaluate the services of the CVO?
- Is education/training regarding credentialing and assessing competency provided to staff?

Interview staff

- Are competencies reviewed by staff with the educational background, experience, or knowledge related to the skills being reviewed?
- Does staff understand what the process is for an initial credentialing/competency assessment? How does this differ from the recredentialing/reassessment process?
- Can staff demonstrate knowledge of the required items/elements in the credentialing process? (e.g., licensure/certification, career history, residency)
- Can staff demonstrate knowledge of skills, traits, and behaviors necessary for competency assessments that are under their supervision? (e.g., ability to conduct appropriate health screenings/assessments, cultural competence, interpersonal communication)
- Do leaders provide appropriate oversight and ensure that assessments, credentialing, and documentation are complete?
- Do the job descriptions of the staff include all the competencies?

Assess your environment

- Review the collection and documentation process to ensure that credentialing and core competencies are thoroughly evaluated.
- Review competency/credential records to ensure that fields are equipped to collect and capture all relevant information.
- Ensure that designated leadership review and verify competencies/credentialing requirements specific to each role under their supervision.

Evaluate implementation

- Review a sample of HR records quarterly to ensure that credentialing/competencies were appropriately documented and conducted when necessary.
- Review the policy and procedures for credentialing/competency evaluations annually to ensure that processes are updated.

What are some resources that can assist in mitigating risks in these areas?

- Core Competencies for Integrated Behavioral Health and Primary Care:
https://www.integration.samhsa.gov/workforce/integration_competencies_final.pdf
- FAQ: Competency assessment vs orientation:
<https://www.jointcommission.org/standards/standard-faqs/behavioral-health/human-resources-management-hrm/000002152/>
- FAQ: What is primary source verification and whom does it apply?:
<https://www.jointcommission.org/standards/standard-faqs/behavioral-health/human-resources-management-hrm/000001357/>