

# Development of a competency framework: physiotherapists' perceptions of workplace knowledge and skills

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**Background:** Workplace competency-based assessment is increasingly being embraced in healthcare.

'Ensuring and developing a competent workforce is of particular relevance to support changing scope of practice, health workforce innovation and reform and for implementing safety and quality initiatives' (State of Victoria, 2014). The purpose of this study was to capture and describe physiotherapists' perceptions of workplace knowledge and skills prior to the development and implementation of a competency framework.

**Methods:** A convenience sample of 46 qualified physiotherapists in a metropolitan hospital network participated in this qualitative study utilising survey questions, semi-structured interviews and focus groups. Survey results were quantitatively analysed and thematic analysis of interviews and focus groups was used to provide a collective insight into physiotherapists' perceptions.

**Results:** Five main themes emerged: confidence in clinical knowledge and skills is mostly high; however, it is affected negatively by perception of isolation in less experienced staff; assessment and feedback around competency is limited, predominantly informal and unstructured; staff openly acknowledge their clinical and non-clinical knowledge and skill limitations, but readily identify clinical risk if more experienced; staff draw on a range of strategies to support their learning, but rely mainly on informal workplace discussion; while staff feel supported to learn outside of work hours, dedicated time and resources within work time would be welcomed.

**Discussion:** Physiotherapists report limited feedback regarding their workplace knowledge and skills, and rely on informal discussion to support their competency development. Less experienced physiotherapists may benefit from structured feedback regarding knowledge, skills and identifying clinical risk.

Physiotherapists may benefit from more frequent and structured assessment around clinical and non-clinical knowledge and skills through dedicated resources within work time. Physiotherapists could consider utilizing a broader range of workplace assessment strategies