

A mixed methods research approach to the review of competency standards for Orthotist/Prosthetists in Australia

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Background

The allied health workforce must expand as the global burden of disease increases. To safely grow the Australian orthotist/prosthetist workforce requires current and evidence based competency standards. The aims of this study were to determine the minimum standard for entry into the orthotic/prosthetic profession; to develop and validate entry level competency standards within the profession nationally.

Method

A mixed methods approach was used. In Stage 1, two focus groups, an expert and a recent graduate group of Australian orthotist/prosthetists, identified gaps in the current competency standards and outlined a key purpose, work roles and tasks for the profession. Thematic analysis identified the domains and activities of the first draft of the competency standards. In Stage 2, the draft was validated within a purposive sample of the membership of the Australian Orthotic Prosthetic Association (AOPA) membership, using the Delphi technique.

Results

In Stage 1, the expert (n=10) and new graduate (n=8) groups separately identified work roles and tasks, which formed the initial draft of the competency standards. Further drafts were refined and performance criteria added by the project reference group. In Stage 2, the final draft was circulated to 56 members (n=44 final round) of AOPA, who agreed on the key purpose, 6 domains, 18 activities and 68 performance criteria of the final competency standards. These standards will underpin self-regulation of the profession, including competency assessment and course accreditation, thereby impacting on individual eligibility to provide services to the Australian public.

Discussion

This study outlines a rigorous and evidence-based mixed methods approach for developing and endorsing professional competency standards, which are representative of the views of the relevant profession. The strength of this methodology lies in the ability for practicing professionals to ensure the standards are reflective of current workplace practices in a valid and reliable manner.