Competence Assurance - The Basics

Complying with The Joint Commission and other regulatory standards and maintaining accreditation can be challenging, time consuming, and frustrating. It's not uncommon to hear staff in healthcare facilities complain that the time they spend dealing with compliance issues and survey preparation takes away from their top priority: caring for patients.

The fact is that these standards are intended to promote safe, effective patient care. Organizations should not assess competency simply because a regulatory body mandates it be done.

Comprehensive competence assurance brings value to the patient, the employee, and the organization.

// WHAT IS COMPETENCE ASSURANCE?

Competency is defined as "the knowledge, skills, ability and behaviors that a person possesses in order to perform tasks correctly and skillfully" (O'Shea, 2002, p. 175). Hospitals are required to assess, maintain, demonstrate, track, and improve the competence of the staff.

More than just completing courses, filling out checklists, and passing tests, **Competence Assessment** is defined as "the systematic collection of practitioner-specific data to determine an individual's capability to perform up to defined expectations." (Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations, 1998). This is an ongoing process of initial development, maintenance of knowledge and skills, educational consultation, remediation, and redevelopment.

Competence Assurance is the formal competency framework, tools, and process of developing, tracking and managing standards to ensure personnel are able to complete assigned tasks to an expected standard. This is instrumental in managing operational, legal and regulatory risk in a world of ever changing tasks, policies, procedures, regulations and technology.

// WHY IS A COMPETENCY FRAMEWORK IMPORTANT?

A **Competency Framework** is a structure that defines competence requirements and the process to distribute and ensure employees fulfill their assigned competencies. The defined sets of competencies can and should be defined and managed at organizational, department, role, function and individual levels.

Competency frameworks can be used to:
- Ensure basic employee health and safety
- Upskill a workforce
- Focus employees on what is critical to enhance their performance and increase their level of work satisfaction
- Provide a roadmap for career planning and development
- Create additional resource capacity by creating skill redundancy across workforce

With an effective framework in place,
- <u>Employees</u> will clearly understand what is expected of them and will have the opportunity to gain and maintain the skills to competently complete their tasks.
- <u>Leaders</u> no longer have to spend valuable time on administrative tasks
- <u>Organizations</u> can stay focused on their vision and mission

// WHAT IS A COMPETENCE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM?

The primary advantage of a **Competence Management System** is that it helps organizations stay organized more effectively than with a paper/spreadsheet based system and access information more efficiently from disparate best-in-class content sources.

Organizations should be wary of solutions that claim to "do it all" from content to tracking to managing. A competence management system is a tool to assist its efforts, not to entirely automate them as competence can never be a totally automated process.

A competence management system usually consists of the ability to:
- Easily author and inventory defined competency sets
- Quickly distribute new and updated competency requirements
- Record competence being achieved or expiring
- Access comprehensive and drill-down on-demand reporting
- Provide real-time access to all competence data

Other features to look out for are:
- User friendly interface
- Allow for localized specific needs
- The ability to upload assessment evidence
- Full audit trail tracking
- Fast and easy integration with 3rd party systems: HR, LMS, IT, external

Competence Assurance is a strategic process. Measuring the performance and development of all employees within a structured system gives more control over risk and cost. It is the perfect structure for ensuring regulatory compliance and supporting high-quality patient care.