



Working collaboratively to produce a Pan London band 5 Neonatal Competency Document



Teresa Rohan, RGN, HDip Midwifery, Bsc (Hons) Neonates, Neonatal Practice Development Nurse (PDN)^{a,*}, Donna Browne, RN Child, ENB 405, 998, Practice Development Sister^b, Jayne Morgan, RGN, RCN, RM, Bsc (Hons), Practice Development Sister^c, Rachel Vinu-Job, RGN, RCN, RM, Bsc (Hons), Lead Practice Educator^d

^a NICU, 4th Floor GJW, Kings College Hospital Foundation Trust, Denmark Hill, London SE59RS, United Kingdom

^b Neonatal Unit, Kingston Hospital Foundation Trust, Galsworthy Road, Kingston KT2 7QB, United Kingdom

^c Neonatal Unit/SCBU, Epsom and St Helier University Hospital NHS Trust, St Helier Hospital, Wrythe Lane, Carshalton, Surrey SM5 1AA, United Kingdom

^d Neonatal Unit, Homerton University Hospital, NHSFT, Homerton Row, London, E9 6SR, United Kingdom

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Abstract Competency documents are widely used as an assessment tool in nursing. The Pan London Educator Group identified a need to have a Pan London band 5 competency document for neonatal staff nurses. The aim of the document is to provide a pathway for the neonatal staff nurse to develop skills & knowledge, career development and act as evidence of achievement. While the validity of competency documents as an assessment tool have been questioned, it can standardise care and provide a record of the development of competence. The document was developed through collaborative working, sharing of ideas and cooperation and the educator group continues to work together on projects. However this process also highlights the need for neonatal units/networks to share projects including

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +44 2032999000x38500.
E-mail address: Teresa.rohan@nhs.net (T. Rohan).

guidelines and protocols which would avoid duplication of projects and improve patient care.

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Introduction

Increasing demands for neonatal services, the need for adequate staffing numbers and the achievement of nursing competence through education and training have been identified as fundamental to achieve a high standard of neonatal care (National Audit Office (NAO), 2007; Department of Health (DH), 2009; British Association of Perinatal Medicine (BAPM), 2012; Royal College of Nursing (RCN), 2012). The Pan London neonatal network, which consists of North Central and East London, North West London and South London, identified a need for a band 5 neonatal competency document to be used by all in the London neonatal units. In essence this competency document provides a resource to help neonatal nurses to deliver high quality and evidence the competency of nurses in neonatal care. In addition, it can be used to develop job description, person specification, training needs and career pathways for the staff in neonatal care. This document will also provide as tool to identify the skills and knowledge that neonatal nurses need and resources for assessing competency as well as supporting recruitment and retention of staff.

National policies, organisational and structural changes have influenced nursing standards over the past decade. Since 2003 neonatal units have been divided into networks providing a level of care ranging from special care level 1- to specialist intensive care of the newborn level 3 (DH, 2009). Neonatal nurses are recruited not only from a paediatric nursing background but from adult and/or midwifery specialities (BAPM, 2012). In order to maintain both recruitment and retention it is fundamental that neonatal nursing has a clear documented learning and career pathways (BAPM, 2012; RCN, 2014). Brenner (2001) sees nursing advancement as a process where staff move from novice to expert through education and building on experience and developing competence. Nursing staff caring for neonates should have the knowledge, skills and competence to fulfil their role and provide high quality care (Department of Health (DH) 2009). BAPM (2010) recommends standards for the education and the training of neonatal

nurses. However, there is no national agreement as what defines Qualified in Speciality with the resulting discrepancy between the various neonatal units and Higher Education Institutions (HIE's) across the UK (United Kingdom) (BAPM, 2012). The NMC (2013) recognises the need to review and improve nurse education and post qualification courses are to be revised in the future in order to protect patients and the public.

In anticipation of the Francis report (2013), England's chief nurse Jane Cummings devised a flagship policy, the 6C's (Department of Health (DH) 2012; Moore, 2013). The 6C's — care, compassion, competence, communication, courage and commitment are a set of values which are seen as integral to the delivery of quality care (DH, 2012). The RCN (2012, 2014) and BAPM (2012) have published a career and training framework to standardise the education, knowledge and competence for neonatal nurses working within the UK. The BAPM (2012) framework was used as a guide to the competency document structure and content and the ethos of the 6C's was instrumental in steering the competency principles.

Process

It was agreed that each network would send nursing educators/representatives to work collaboratively on the competency document. In response the Pan London Educator Group was established. The educator group met and it was agreed that each network wrote one or more competency sections. Subsequently there were smaller core group meetings who met on six occasions to edit the document and standardise the level of competence and vocabulary. In order for the competency document to be user friendly for both the learner and assessor the language was clear and uncomplicated. From the outset it was recognised that there was much variation in what was expected of band 5's between units irrespective of their level of care. While competence is essential to obtaining NMC registration (NMC, 2015), there are many aspects to competency assessment as well as many interpretations of competence (Petty, 2014). While there is no

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