



## Core competencies\* for undergraduate students in clinical associate, dentistry and medical teaching and learning programmes in South Africa

Developed by the Undergraduate Education and Training Subcommittee of the Medical and  
Dental Professions Board in collaboration with training institutions and the South African  
Committee of Medical and Dental Deans.



## 1 ROLE: HEALTHCARE PRACTITIONER

As *healthcare practitioners*, healthcare professionals integrate all of the graduate attribute roles, applying profession-specific knowledge, clinical skills and professional attitudes in their provision of patient/client-centred care. The *healthcare practitioner* is the central role in the framework of graduate attributes.

### 1.1 KEY COMPETENCY

Function effectively as entry-level healthcare practitioners, integrating all graduate attribute roles to provide optimal, ethical, comprehensive and patient/client-centred care in a plurality of health and social contexts.

#### 1.1.1 ENABLING COMPETENCIES

- a) Perform a consultation or facilitate a structured clinical encounter effectively, including thorough documentation of assessments and recommendations.
- b) Identify and respond appropriately to relevant ethical issues arising in patient/client care and clinical decision-making.
- c) Prioritise professional duties effectively and appropriately when caring for multiple patients/clients and being challenged to address their healthcare needs holistically.
- d) Provide compassionate, empathetic and patient/client-centred care.
- e) Demonstrate a commitment to work in primary healthcare settings (urban and rural), and find professional and personal satisfaction in it.

### 1.2 KEY COMPETENCY

Acquire and maintain knowledge, skills, attitudes and character appropriate to their practice.

#### 1.2.1 ENABLING COMPETENCIES

- a) Reflect on, integrate, apply and evaluate core knowledge, skills, attitudes and character acquired during undergraduate training in:
  - the application of appropriate academic literacy, numeracy and information technology skills;
  - natural sciences;
  - normal human structure;
  - normal biological, psychological, social and spiritual development and functioning of the individual in the context of family and community;
  - the pattern, aetiology and history of common human disease processes and mechanisms;
  - physical, psychological, social and spiritual determinants of health and disease;
  - the principles of drug action and use;
  - the efficacy of various therapies;

- the holistic management of functional and structural impairment, activity limitations and participation restrictions, all with reference to personal and environmental risk factors;
- the interdependence between health and education systems; and
- the ethical, human rights and legal principles embedded in healthcare.

b) Apply life-long learning skills to keep up to date and to enhance professional competence.

### 1.3 KEY COMPETENCY

Perform comprehensive assessments of patients/clients.

#### 1.3.1 ENABLING COMPETENCIES

- a) Effectively identify and explore issues to be addressed in a patient/client encounter, including the patient/client's context and preferences.
- b) Elicit a history of the patient/client that is relevant, concise and accurate to context, for the purposes of disease prevention, health promotion, diagnosis and/or management.
- c) Perform a holistic and focused examination that is relevant and accurate, for the purposes of disease prevention, health promotion, diagnosis and/or management.
- d) Select appropriate investigative methods in a resource-effective and ethical manner.
- e) Demonstrate effective problem-solving and judgement to address patient/client problems, including interpreting data and integrating information to make differential diagnoses and propose holistic management plans.
- f) Demonstrate increasing proficiency in clinical decision-making.

### 1.4 KEY COMPETENCY 1.4

Use preventive, promotive, therapeutic and rehabilitative interventions effectively.

#### 1.4.1 ENABLING COMPETENCIES

- a) Demonstrate effective, appropriate and timely application of therapeutic interventions.
- b) Include prevention and health promotion in the management plan.
- c) Consider the range of solutions that have been developed for treatment and prevention of health problems, taking into consideration all ages and diverse communities.
- d) Formulate and implement appropriate holistic, cost-appropriate and effective management plans in collaboration with patients/clients and their families, emphasising the importance of healthy behaviour and the patient/client's right to choice.
- e) Ensure that appropriate informed consent is obtained for interventions and that patients/clients' needs and rights are respected.

- f) Appropriately utilise clinical-care and patient-care guidelines and protocols, and demonstrate the ability to adapt these to local settings.
- g) Develop and deliver appropriate follow-up and ongoing care beyond the immediate consultation and short-term management plan.
- h) Recognise acute life-threatening emergencies, and initiate appropriate treatment and referral.
- i) Take cognisance of the structure, organisation and functioning of the South African healthcare system in compiling the patient/client care plan.

## 1.5 KEY COMPETENCY 1.5

Demonstrate efficient and appropriate use of procedural skills, both diagnostic and therapeutic.

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### 1.5.1 ENABLING COMPETENCIES

- a) Demonstrate effective, appropriate and timely performance of diagnostic, therapeutic and rehabilitative procedures.
- b) Appropriately document and disseminate information related to procedures performed and their outcomes.
- c) Ensure adequate follow-up care and care continuity for procedures performed.

## 1.6 KEY COMPETENCY 1.6

Seek appropriate consultation from other healthcare professionals, recognising the limits of their own and others' expertise.

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### 1.6.1 ENABLING COMPETENCIES

- a) Demonstrate insight into own limitations of expertise.
- b) Demonstrate effective, appropriate and timely consultation of other healthcare practitioners as needed for optimal patient/client care.

## 2 ROLE: COMMUNICATOR

As *communicators*, healthcare professionals effectively facilitate the carer-patient/carer-client relationship and the dynamic exchanges that occur before, during and after interventions.

### 2.1 KEY COMPETENCY 2.1

Develop rapport, trust and ethical therapeutic relationships with patients/clients, families and communities from different cultural backgrounds.

#### 2.1.1 ENABLING COMPETENCIES

- a) Demonstrate a both patient/client-centred and community-centred approach in interactions with patients/clients and their families.
- b) Practise good communication as a core clinical skill, recognising that effective communication between the healthcare professional and the patient/client can foster patient/client and professional satisfaction, as well as adherence and improved clinical outcomes.
- c) Establish positive therapeutic relationships with patients/clients and their families characterised by understanding, trust, respect, honesty, integrity and empathy.
- d) Respect patient/client confidentiality, privacy and autonomy.
- e) Motivate patients/clients and their families and communities to take personal responsibility for their health.
- f) Demonstrate flexibility in the application of communication skills.

### 2.2 KEY COMPETENCY 2.2

Accurately elicit and synthesise relevant information and perspectives of patients/clients and families, communities, colleagues and other professionals.

#### 2.2.1 ENABLING COMPETENCIES

- a) Gather information about health conditions and functioning, as well as about a patient/client's beliefs, concerns, expectations and illness experience.
- b) Seek and synthesise appropriate information from relevant sources, such as a patient/client's family, community, caregivers and other professionals.
- c) Communicate effectively by listening, clarifying uncertainties, probing sensitively, and being aware of, and responsive to, non-verbal cues.

### 2.3 KEY COMPETENCY 2.3

Convey relevant information and explanations accurately and effectively to patients/clients, families, communities, colleagues and other professionals as well as statutory and professional bodies.

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### 2.3.1 ENABLING COMPETENCIES

- a) Retrieve patient/client-specific information from a clinical data system.
- b) Deliver information to a patient/client and family, communities, colleagues and other professionals in a humane manner and in such a way that it is understandable, and encourages discussion and participation in decision-making.
- c) Present well-documented assessments and recommendations effectively in written and/or verbal form in response to a request from another healthcare professional.
- d) Compile accurate reports as needed and required for statutory and professional purposes.

## 2.4 KEY COMPETENCY 2.4

Develop a common understanding of issues, problems and plans with patients/clients, families, communities, colleagues and other professionals, to develop a shared plan of care/action.

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### 2.4.1 ENABLING COMPETENCIES

- a) Identify and explore problems to be addressed effectively from a patient/client encounter, including the patient/client's functioning, context, responses, concerns and preferences.
- b) Respect diversity and difference and the influence of ethnicity, gender, religion, education and culture on decision-making.
- c) Encourage discussion, questions and interaction.
- d) Engage patients/clients, families, communities and relevant healthcare professionals in shared decision-making to develop a plan of care/action.
- e) Effectively address challenging communication issues, such as obtaining informed consent, delivering bad news, and addressing anger, confusion and misunderstanding.
- f) Communicate effectively with patients/clients and their families about costs and risks implicit in clinical interventions and care, in order to minimise potential medico-legal issues.

## 2.5 KEY COMPETENCY 2.5

Convey effective and accurate oral and written information about a clinical encounter.

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### 2.5.1 ENABLING COMPETENCIES

- a) Maintain clear, accurate and appropriate records (written or electronic) of all clinical encounters and plans, within systems that allow for the dependable and rapid retrieval of such information.
- b) Present effective oral and written reports of clinical encounters and plans, using language, visual, information technology and numeracy skills.
- c) Recognise ethical and legal issues in compiling patient/client documentation.

### 3 ROLE: COLLABORATOR

As *collaborators*, healthcare professionals work effectively within a team to achieve optimal patient/client care.

#### 3.1 KEY COMPETENCY 3.1

Participate effectively and appropriately in multicultural, interprofessional and transprofessional teams, as well as teams in other contexts (the community included).

##### 3.1.1 ENABLING COMPETENCIES

- a) Describe their own roles and responsibilities to other professionals.
- b) Recognise and respect – irrespective of profession, status, age, gender, race, class or beliefs – the diversity of roles, responsibilities and competencies of other team members. Appreciate diversity, and demonstrate the ability to adapt. (Healthcare team members may include other professionals, community workers and practitioners of alternative, complementary and cultural/traditional healthcare practice).
- c) Work interdependently and share tasks with others to assess, plan, provide and integrate quality care for individual patients/clients (or groups of patients/clients).
- d) Collaborate with others, where appropriate, to assess, plan, provide and review other tasks, such as research problems, educational work, programme review or administrative responsibilities.
- e) Participate effectively in interprofessional team meetings, respecting team ethics, including confidentiality, resource allocation and professionalism.
- f) Demonstrate appropriate leadership in a healthcare team.

#### 3.2 KEY COMPETENCY 3.2

Work effectively with other healthcare professionals to promote positive relationships and prevent, negotiate and resolve interpersonal conflict.

##### 3.2.1 ENABLING COMPETENCIES

- a) Demonstrate a respectful attitude towards other team members, and work with other professionals to promote positive relationships and prevent conflict.
- b) Employ collaborative negotiation skills to achieve consensus and/or resolve conflict.
- c) Recognise differences, misunderstandings and limitations in other professionals, and acknowledge their own differences, misunderstandings and limitations that may contribute to interpersonal tension.
- d) Reflect on improving interprofessional and transprofessional team function.

## 4 ROLE: LEADER & MANAGER

As *leaders and managers*, healthcare practitioners are integral participants in healthcare organisations, organising sustainable practices, making decisions about allocating resources, and contributing to the effectiveness of the healthcare system.

### 4.1 KEY COMPETENCY 4.1

Participate in activities that contribute to the effectiveness of the healthcare organisations and systems in which they work.

#### 4.1.1 ENABLING COMPETENCIES

- a) Work with others in their organisations, understanding the structure and functioning of the healthcare systems as these relate to their practice.
- b) Demonstrate the competence to work in home and community-based care settings, with insight into the potential contributions of community support groups.
- c) Participate in the quality process evaluation and improvement of systems, such as practice audits, mortality and morbidity meetings and patient/client safety initiatives, integrating the available best evidence and practice.
- d) Demonstrate problem-solving enterprise and creativity in improving and managing a healthcare system, and by providing advice to relevant authorities, with support from superiors.

### 4.2 KEY COMPETENCY 4.2

Manage their practice and career effectively.

#### 4.2.1 ENABLING COMPETENCIES

- a) Set priorities and manage time to balance patient/client care, practice requirements, outside activities and personal life.
- b) Manage their professional practice, including finances, human resources and effective record keeping.
- c) Implement processes to ensure personal practice improvement.
- d) Use information technology effectively in managing healthcare environments.

### 4.3 KEY COMPETENCY 4.3

Utilise finite healthcare resources appropriately.

#### 4.3.1 ENABLING COMPETENCIES

- a) Utilise healthcare resources under their control carefully and fairly.
- b) Apply evidence and good management to achieve cost-appropriate care.



#### 4.4 KEY COMPETENCY 4.4

Serve in administration and leadership roles, as appropriate.

##### 4.4.1 ENABLING COMPETENCIES

- a) Participate effectively in committees and meetings, as the need arises.
- b) Participate in implementing change, where necessary, in the healthcare organisation in which they are serving.
- c) Plan relevant elements of healthcare delivery (e.g. duty rosters).

#### 4.5 KEY COMPETENCY 4.5

Provide effective healthcare to geographically defined communities.

##### 4.5.1 ENABLING COMPETENCIES

- a) Play a constructive, critical and creative role in the organisation, management and provision of healthcare, in the community, hospital and other facilities where profession-specific services are rendered.
- b) Evaluate the burden of disease within the community using local, regional, national and global data.
- c) Identify the health determinants of the population, such as genetic, demographic, environmental, socio-economic, psychological, cultural and lifestyle-related determinants.
- d) Evaluate existing primary healthcare practice and community health programmes.
- e) Evaluate the elements of the local health system, taking into consideration the economic and practical constraints within which the service is delivered and the audit process to monitor its delivery.
- f) Collaborate with other professionals, relevant organisations and the community to draw up a plan to manage the identified health priorities and to collectively promote health.
- g) During planning, take cognisance of the functional links between primary healthcare and public health, the interface between hospital and home-based care, and the principles of ethics and human rights in community-oriented healthcare.

## 5 ROLE: HEALTH ADVOCATE

As *health advocates*, healthcare professionals responsibly use their expertise and influence to advance the health and well-being of individuals, communities and populations.

### 5.1 KEY COMPETENCY 5.1

Respond to individual patient/client health needs and related issues as part of holistic care.

#### 5.1.1 ENABLING COMPETENCIES

- a) Identify the health needs of an individual patient/client, taking into consideration his/her culture.
- b) Identify and use opportunities for health promotion and disease prevention with individuals to whom they provide care, incorporating ethical and human rights principles.
- c) Act as advocates for patient/client groups with particular health needs (including the poor and marginalised members of society).

### 5.2 KEY COMPETENCY 5.2

Respond to the health needs of the communities that they serve.

#### 5.2.1 ENABLING COMPETENCIES

- a) Familiarise themselves with the communities they serve by obtaining insight into the functioning of the local health system, barriers to access care and resources, and other factors not directly part of healthcare.,
- b) Identify vulnerable or marginalised populations and respond appropriately, with a commitment to equity through access to care and equal opportunities.
- c) Identify opportunities for health promotion and disease prevention within the context of promoting a healthy environment and lifestyle.
- d) Communicate effectively with communities, and enable them to identify, prioritise and address healthcare needs specific to them.
- e) Recognise and respond to competing interests within the community being served by reporting these to the relevant stakeholders in the community.
- f) Apply the ethical and professional principles inherent in health advocacy, including altruism, social justice, autonomy, integrity and idealism, appreciating the possibility of conflict inherent in the role of *health advocate*.

## 6 ROLE: SCHOLAR

As *scholars*, healthcare professionals demonstrate a lifelong commitment to reflective learning as well as the creation, dissemination, application and translation of knowledge.

### 6.1 KEY COMPETENCY 6.1

Maintain and enhance professional competence through ongoing learning, both as healthcare professionals and as responsible citizens, locally and globally.

#### 6.1.1 ENABLING COMPETENCIES

- a) Reflect on and acknowledge the strengths and limitations of their knowledge and skills.
- b) Commit to maintaining and enhancing knowledge and skills using a personal development plan.
- c) Use appropriate strategies and utilise opportunities for continued professional development and lifelong learning.
- d) Be able to maintain comprehensive, complete and accessible records for the purposes of good practice and the facilitation of audits and healthcare research.
- e) Reflect on, and learn from, challenges that are experienced in practice by posing appropriate questions, accessing and interpreting relevant evidence, integrating new learning with practice, evaluating the impact of change in practice, and documenting the learning process.
- f) Know the requirements of the regulations regarding continuous professional development (CPD), as specified by the Health Professions Council of South Africa.

### 6.2 KEY COMPETENCY 6.2

Ask questions about practice, locate relevant evidence, critically evaluate and interpret information and sources, and consider the application of the information.

#### 6.2.1 ENABLING COMPETENCIES

- a) Phrase clear, answerable, relevant questions related to practice.
- b) Utilise knowledge gained through the critical evaluation of health-related literature to keep up to date with new developments.
- c) Use appropriate techniques to effectively and efficiently access relevant research findings from reliable sources.
- d) Critically appraise retrieved evidence for quality and relevance, and interpret the findings.
- e) Consider the applicability of research findings to own setting.
- f) Understand the basic principles of quantitative and qualitative research design and analysis as well as research ethics.

- g) Respect and comply with laws pertaining to plagiarism, confidentiality and ownership of intellectual property when accessing and using information and conducting research.

### 6.3 KEY COMPETENCY 6.3

Facilitate the learning of patients/clients, families, students, other healthcare professionals, the public, staff and others, as appropriate.

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#### 6.3.1 ENABLING COMPETENCIES

- a) Identify collaboratively the learning needs and desired learning outcomes of others.
- b) Select effective teaching strategies and content to facilitate others' learning.
- c) Reflect on teaching encounters and seek feedback to guide their development as effective facilitators of learning.
- d) Create an enabling and supportive learning environment that is sensitive to issues that can influence learning.
- e) Listen and provide feedback.
- f) Seek and utilise opportunities to develop their skills as facilitators of learning and as mentors.

## 7 ROLE: PROFESSIONAL

As *professionals*, healthcare professionals are committed to ensure the health and well-being of individuals and communities through ethical practice, profession-led self-regulation and high personal standards of behaviour.

### 7.1 KEY COMPETENCY 7.1

Demonstrate commitment and accountability to their patients/clients, other healthcare professions and society through ethical practice.

#### 7.1.1 ENABLING COMPETENCIES

- a) Exhibit and promote appropriate professional behaviour, including honesty, integrity, commitment, compassion, respect for life, accessibility and altruism.
- b) Demonstrate a commitment to delivering the highest quality care and maintenance of professional competence according to the values of the profession.
- c) Recognise and appropriately respond to ethical, legal and human rights issues and dilemmas encountered in practice and not be influenced by political pressure.
- d) Recognise and appropriately manage conflict of interest in practice.
- e) Recognise the principles and limits of patient/client confidentiality as defined by professional practice standards and law.
- f) Maintain appropriate professional relations with patients/clients, healthcare professionals and communities.

### 7.2 KEY COMPETENCY 7.2

Demonstrate a commitment to their patients/clients, healthcare professionals and society through participation in profession-led self-regulation.

#### 7.2.1 ENABLING COMPETENCIES

- a) Adhere to the appropriate professional, legal and ethical codes of practice of the profession.
- b) Recognise and interrogate public health policy in terms of ethics and human rights.
- c) Demonstrate accountability and fulfil the regulatory and legal obligations required by the regulatory bodies of the health professions.
- d) Recognise, address and report unprofessional behaviour encountered in healthcare training and practice.
- e) Maintain professional competence through ongoing self-reflection and peer review.

### 7.3 KEY COMPETENCY 7.3

Demonstrate a commitment to own health and sustainable practice.

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#### 7.3.1 ENABLING COMPETENCIES

- a) Make informed choices for their own future career development based on an understanding of the nature and scope of various professions.
- b) Recognise and balance personal and professional priorities to achieve personal health and a sustainable and effective practice.
- c) Demonstrate insight into personal and professional problems, and develop strategies to address them effectively with the aim to maintain own physical, psychological, social and spiritual well-being.
- d) Recognise other professionals in need, and respond appropriately.