



AGENCY FOR HEALTHCARE RESEARCH AND QUALITY

Competency Check vs. Observational Audit

Validate Nursing Home Staff Performance To Improve Infection Prevention Processes for COVID-19

This document explains the difference between the competency check you complete to meet education and regulatory compliance for your nursing home and the observational audits that you complete as part of the ongoing Quality Assurance Performance Improvement (QAPI) process.

One major difference between competency checks and observational audits is that competency checks occur in a controlled environment, such as a scheduled training, while observational audits are completed while nursing home staff are in the actual work environment. For this reason, observational audits allow you to obtain accurate compliance rates and identify process failures, such as a step in the handwashing process that some staff miss. These are the data points you need for an effective QAPI project.

The chart below helps you identify additional differences between competency checks and observational audits and when each is appropriate.

Competencies/Skills Check **Use:** Demonstrate staff knowledge of proper task performance.	**Observational Audit** **Use:** Obtain data about actual task performance and process gaps that can be used to inform quality improvement activity.

• Per the Nursing Home COVID-19 Infection Control Assessment and Response (ICAR) facility risk assessment recommended by CMS, qualified team member uses standardized facility tools to educate and evaluate staff. Please see links below:
  ○ Nursing Home Facility Assessment Tool
  ○ Nursing Home COVID-19 Infection Control Assessment Response (ICAR) Tool
	• Staff/leaders are trained to conduct audits by a qualified team member.
	  ○ For example, a Licensed Nurse Educator may train on clinical audits or a Dietary Director may train on food service audits.
	• Audit findings are submitted to the qualified team member for review.

• The employee **is** aware of the observation. • Education/training **is** provided first. Training should follow organizational policies and procedures. • Training is typically conducted during a scheduled education, such as an orientation or a skills fair.	• Observational audits are unannounced. • Review of procedure **is not** completed prior to observation. The observer evaluates current knowledge and skill in the normal work environment.

Competencies/Skills Check **Use:** Demonstrate staff knowledge of proper task performance.	Observational Audit **Use:** Obtain data about actual task performance and process gaps that can be used to inform quality improvement activity.
• If education, coaching, or correction is required and the employee demonstrates/verbalizes understanding, this equals **"Met."**	• If education, coaching, or correction is required during an observation to avoid a potential infection prevention error, but the employee verbalizes understanding, this equals **"Not Met."**
• Performed **annually** and as needed with new procedures or procedural updates.	• Performed **regularly** as defined by your facility. • Captures all shifts, including weekends.
• Feedback is provided during demonstration.	• One-to-one feedback is provided in private after observation is complete. • Immediate feedback should be provided to prevent a future error. • Feedback should be documented in writing.
• Results are placed in employee file for staff education requirements and used for survey evidence of competency.	• Results are aggregated for tracking/trending and retained as a part of your facility's QAPI program.

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