

The Need for Aligning Quality Workforce Competencies



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In the drive to significantly improve healthcare value, the quality profession is at an inflection point, according to Andrew Kopolow. Faced with an inflection point, the profession itself, and those within, must rise to the new challenges of disruptive change or face a decline in position and influence.

Kopolow is among the many healthcare professionals who have been advancing healthcare quality and is quick to recognize their role in healthcare improvement. He calls out a new era with new ways of working for healthcare quality professionals that will draw from a strong foundation of progressive past achievements but requires new training, development, and re-defined roles around a central tenet. Kopolow says, “We cannot change healthcare quality one healthcare quality professional at a time. The Healthcare Quality Profession and the healthcare system must align on quality.”

For Kopolow, alignment comes from adopting industry-standard competencies to prepare and leverage the quality workforce and its leadership to deliver on heightened quality and value expectations and requirements. In fact, the near-20-year healthcare quality veteran chaired the NAHQ Competencies Commission during a key phase of development of the [NAHQ Healthcare Quality Competency Framework](#).

Three reasons to align using the NAHQ Healthcare Quality Competency Framework

The U.S. health system’s move toward Healthcare Value sets new expectations for the role of the quality workforce and quality programs. To achieve its goals, the industry must move away from just-in-time healthcare quality staffing solutions developed at the local level that are not standard or reliable. NAHQ’s industry-standard Healthcare Quality Competency Framework offers a solution to needed alignment across care settings and for new expectations in the era of Healthcare Value.

1. It’s been developed in response to demand from quality professionals across healthcare.

With the rapid pace of change and imperatives to drive quality, healthcare quality professionals have been seeking ways to identify and develop needed new skills and competencies to support the expanding scope of their responsibilities, Kopolow says. Everyone knows the expectations

for the work has changed, but until now no one had articulated what the change ‘was’ or what new competencies were required to raise the value platform for quality.

In response to this call to action, NAHQ in 2013 began convening quality experts, to define the current and future skills and capabilities for the healthcare quality workforce. In the first-generation work product NAHQ defined practice domains and competencies, supported by specific behaviors for advanced quality practitioners. In May 2019, NAHQ finalized the competency set for the entire profession, articulating 8 Domains, 29 Competency Statements, and 486 Behavior Statements for novice, proficient, and advanced healthcare quality professionals.

This work built on more than 30 years of proven education and training leadership from NAHQ, which in 1974 introduced the Certified Professional in Healthcare Quality®, (CPHQ) the industry-standard and only accredited certification in healthcare quality. NAHQ has continued to add to its workforce development tools with the introduction of HQ Principles for new and future quality professionals, and HQ Essentials for quality leaders. This year NAHQ will introduce a Self-Assessment to strengthen healthcare quality professionals’ career development resources so that they can better align with healthcare transformation. [Concepts in Healthcare Quality & Safety for Frontline Staff](#) will be introduced to support organization-wide improvement efforts.

2. It’s been designed for healthcare quality professionals by healthcare quality professionals.

In focus groups, Delphi sessions, interviews and volunteer working groups, quality professionals across healthcare played an essential role in the development of the NAHQ Healthcare Quality Competency Framework. Participants included quality professionals from providers ranging in size, patient population, geography and care continuum as well as academics, consultants, association leaders, and payers.

3. It’s been validated—twice.

NAHQ validated the framework through two sequential surveys.

Respondents confirmed all the competency statements in the framework were important and comprehensive; no additional competency statements were identified.

NAHQ then developed a professional assessment of the Competency Framework, which it distributed through an e-mail survey to a random sample from within the NAHQ database of 1,500 healthcare quality professionals. Content and discriminant validity were both confirmed.

Moving forward together

Given the rigor in development and testing of the framework and the high level of professional

involvement at every step, Kopolow says, “We are confident in this resource. We believe it should be leveraged for maximum impact across the industry.”

The power and potential of the framework, he says, lie in driving crucial alignment and consistent competency sets among organizations and their quality workforces. But it doesn’t stop there. It can be used as “a springboard for NAHQ to develop anything from career development to educational programming to something we have not even thought of that will further define the boundaries and depth of our profession.”

NAHQ is building these career-supporting quality solutions and can support individuals and organizations to leverage competencies to drive [Quality Driven Healthcare](#).

To learn more about competency-based training and workforce development, please contact NAHQ at teamtraining@nahq.org.