

DYSPHAGIA COMPETENCIES FAQ

Q1. As a dietitian working in residential care, I currently refer to the *Competencies for Dysphagia Assessment and Management in Dietetic Practice*, but would like to ensure that I am up-to-date on any unique standards/policies that are legislated in New Brunswick.

The *Competencies for Dysphagia Assessment and Management in Dietetic Practice* (dysphagia competencies) were first published in 2017 by the Alliance of Canadian Dietetic Regulatory Bodies and adopted by the New Brunswick Association of Dietitians (NBAD) on March 17, 2018. The document has been reviewed to add practice illustrations to the existing content. On September 21, 2020, the NBAD Board of Directors reviewed the addition of examples and agreed that it would be helpful to registrants in New Brunswick.

Q2. Dysphagia assessment and management is not part of my practice. What are dysphagia competencies and why didn't I learn more about this during my internship?

The dysphagia competencies set out the expectations for safe, ethical, and effective dietetic practice in the area of dysphagia assessment and management. The dysphagia competencies build on entry to practice competencies [[Integrated Competencies for Dietetic Education and Practice](#) (ICDEP)] and identify additional performance indicators for this area of practice. The competencies apply to dietitians through the career continuum, from initial stages where one might be gaining experience to those with many years of experience and expertise.

Q3. I would like to expand my knowledge in the area of dysphagia. Currently, there is a need for more support in my community. What are some considerations I should be aware of?

The updated dysphagia competencies may be helpful in this instance. Dysphagia and swallowing assessments are within dietetic scope of practice. However, you may want to consider the following points:

What is your work environment? Is the role of dysphagia management under the umbrella of your job description in your workplace?

For example, in some Health Authorities, swallowing disorders fall under the responsibility of the Speech-language Pathologist (SLP) and/or Occupational Therapist (OT). In this instance, the dietitian's role is not to provide swallowing assessments; rather, it would be to ensure that the kitchen is providing a culturally appropriate diet of correct texture and fluid consistency that falls

within the SLP/OT recommendation while considering the preferences and the allergy status of the patient, as well to monitor the intake, acceptance and adequacy of that diet.

If the role of the dietitian in your workplace is expanding to provide swallowing assessments, it is important to consider your own personal limitations on scope. Do you have the knowledge, skills and judgement to take on this aspect of practice safely, ethically and competently?

Included in the NBAD Code of Ethics, "the dietitian assumes responsibility and accountability for personal competence in practice. She or he has an obligation to acquire new skills and knowledge in the areas of practice on a continuing basis to ensure safe, competent and ethical dietetic practice (Standard 2.2)". It is important for you to have the skills necessary to be deemed capable in this area of practice. These skills can be gained with training opportunities provided by your employer such as on-the-job training, courses and workshops offered by Dietitians of Canada and/or workshops offered by other dietitians with an expertise in this area.

Q4. Although we can't perform instrumental exams such as FEES (Fibreoptic Endoscopic Evaluation of Swallowing) or MBS (Modified Barium Swallow), are dietitians permitted to be trained in the interpretation of the results that are gathered from these studies?

You are correct in that dietitians may not administer an instrumental exam for dysphagia assessment and management. Administering a device beyond the pharynx is not an authorized activity included in the [Dietitians Act](#). Section 3.012 of the dysphagia competencies outlines the scope for a dietitian during an instrumental swallowing study. You'll note that "review and interpret findings, including limitations [of the test]" is included.

NBAD encourages you to reflect on your own personal scope of practice. You may reflect on the Standard 2.3 of the NBAD Code of Ethics "the dietitian must work within her or his level of competence and if/when the situation is beyond her or his level of competence, seek additional information or refer to another qualified professional". Ultimately, it is your responsibility to ensure you are capable and competent to assess and manage dysphagia, should you be requested to perform these in your job.

If you have any questions regarding the *Competencies for Dysphagia Assessment and Management in Dietetic Practice* and/or its application in practice, please contact the NBAD Registrar at registrar@adnb-nbad.com.

Adapted from *You Asked About...Dysphagia Competencies* (October 2019 Monthly Update) by the College of Dietitians of British Columbia (CDBC). The New Brunswick Association of Dietitians thanks CDBC for their generous permission to quote and adapt their publication.