

# CRITICAL COMPETENCIES IN SPECIALIST PHYSICIAN TRAINING IN OCCUPATIONAL MEDICINE AND WAYS TO ASSESS THESE – Trainers’ perspective

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## THE SCOPE

The medical specialist training is under reform in Finland and changes include the building of competency based curriculum. Specialist training in occupational medicine (OM) is provided by five universities in close national-level collaboration. The training takes place mostly in workplaces, at the occupational health (OH) centers, that have made an agreement of training with the university. In 2017 there were 907 trainees trained by 358 trainers nationwide.

The curriculum, set by universities and including target competencies, aligns the training in the workplace. The fundamental part of the training is the two-year period in the service of an OH unit where the tutoring physician (trainer) provides tutorial sessions for the trainee. These sessions serve as one of the main methods of learning.

Trainers have agreed with the university on assessing the progress of their trainees continuously in two hours’ weekly tutorial sessions and every six months. Now, the reform requires re-evaluation of the current target competencies and further development of feasible assessment practices depicting progress.

In this study, we aimed to explore the trainers’ views on the critical core competencies in OM and ways to assess these.

## THE SURVEY & RESULTS

In 2018, we carried out an online survey among trainers in the specialty of OM at the University of Helsinki. We used descriptive statistics to analyse the quantitative data and the qualitative data we analysed thematically.

There were 45/123 (37%) actively training trainers who responded to the survey (76% female). The professional expertise varied among the respondents: the trainers had gained their qualifications between the years 1983 and 2017. The experience as a trainer varied as well: 1/3 of the trainers had more than ten years, 1/3 five to ten years and 1/3 less than five years of training experience.

In multiple choice questions (Figure 1), the most critical competencies were related to communication skills and multi-professional skills (mean 4,9 in 5-point Likert scale). In open-ended answers, trainers described communication, medical- and work ability related expertise as the three most important competencies. Furthermore, it is important to

have understanding about working life, economics and financial issues amongst with abilities to manage large entities and diverse customerships (eg. the patient, the company).

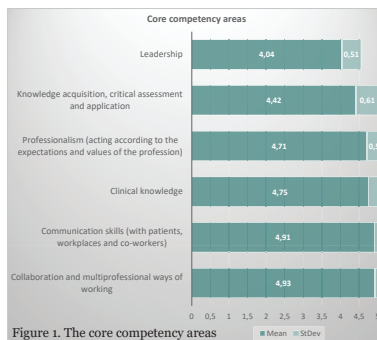


Figure 1. The core competency areas

Trainers are well engaged in the agreed assessment practices (Figure 2). In addition, they value the possibilities for ad hoc consultations, collaboration and discussing challenging situations to follow the trainees’ development.

## CONCLUSIONS

Training in the specialty of OM is university led learning at work and supervised by the trainers. Trainers in OM specialist training are active and highly engaged in coaching. While having the key role in the assessment of the trainee’s development at workplace level, they also consider this assessing role as an essential part of the training. Trainers are also in a position to observe what are the essential skills, knowledge and attitudes needed in every day practical work. They are therefore in a grandstand view to the changes in the practice of both training and also in OH services.

## TAKE HOME MESSAGES

- Trainers consider communication, medical- and work ability related expertise as the most critical competencies in OH.
- Trainers are engaged in following the individual development of their trainees and thus important for the trainees’ learning process.
- It is crucial to involve the trainers in the curriculum development to ensure continuous validity and accuracy of the curriculum.



Figure 2. The assessment practices