Australian College of Neonatal Nurses Incorporated (INC1300211)

Holistic Assessment Tool

Competent Level

Australian College of Neonatal Nurses Incorporated (INC1300211) *Holistic Assessment Tool for Competent Neonatal Nurses 2025



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Version Control

The ACNN Holistic Assessment Tool – Competent

The ACNN (INC1300211) Holistic Assessment Tool – Competent will remain current until 2030 (5 years) or earlier when modifications are required.

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Competent level in neonatal nursing

At competent level, a neonatal nurse has progressed in the NICU/SCU and is able to prioritise tasks based on their experience. They begin to work efficiently with deliberate planning and can question and compare care decisions. The competent neonatal nurse is developing consciousness of choices and starts to use this to approach new clinical problems.

Use of the holistic assessment tool

A holistic approach to assessing nurse knowledge and performance involves observing the neonatal nurse's overall role performance. This includes observing and assessing their communication, ethics, technical skills, cultural awareness, attitudes, knowledge, professional behaviors, clinical decision making, and critical thinking.

As an assessment of practice, assessors must, therefore, carry out the observation in the context of the neonatal nurse's interactions with infants and families. This method is useful in determining the nurse's skills, knowledge, values and attributes within their practice.

A holistic assessment of practice is a valid model of measuring core skills and competencies, but should be conducted via a collaborative relationship between neonatal nurse and the assessor. This ensures mutual understanding of the process, and helps the neonatal nurse feel confident in the process and its purpose.

During the assessment, the assessor uses their knowledge and professional judgement, drawing inferences and tacit awareness to form conclusions about the neonatal nurse's practice. Therefore, use of this tool requires sufficient duration of observation in the nurse's usual clinical context to achieve a reliable assessment.

At the conclusion of the observation period, an essential component of the assessment is the reflection process. Assessor and neonatal nurse discuss the observation, performance, strengths and developing skills/knowledge to provide guidance on further development.

Competent level holistic assessment

Neonatal nurse's name:_____ Date:_____

General allocated patient information

Standard 1: Thinks critically and analyses nursing practice

1.1 Competent –1-2 years

1.2.1 Understands the importance of utilising best available evidence in making decisions to inform the provision of safe, quality nursing care.
1.2.2 Understands the impact of different cultures on behaviours related to health and family, and practises in a culturally sensitive manner through impartiality and objectivity.
1.2.3 Critically assesses and analyses the influence of the neonatal unit environment on neonates and families.

Supporting evidence

Standard 2: Engages in therapeutic and professional relationships

2.1 Competent – 1-2 years

2.2.1 Demonstrates confidence in providing information, education and support to families to enhance their capacity to make collaborative decisions about the health and wellbeing of their neonate.

2.2.2 Is conscious of the importance of a culture of safety and learning in building therapeutic relationships in the workplace.

2.2.3 Competently mentors colleagues, undergraduate and new graduate students to mutually build skills, growth and trusting professional relationships.

2.2.4 Actively listens, identifies, responds and advocates for social, emotional, spiritual and cultural needs of the family.

2.2.5 Incorporates Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander paradigms to support the development of the therapeutic relationship with Indigenous families.

Supporting evidence

Standard 3: Maintains capability for practice

3.1 Competent – 1-2 years

3.2.1 Undertakes a diverse range of continuing professional development activities that include self-care management and well-being strategies.

3.2.2 Refers to local governing documents that are relevant to neonatal care, including best available evidence-based clinical guidelines, policies and procedures and compares to those from other organisations.

3.2.3 Questions and intervenes when patient care is compromised by unsafe or illegal practice.

3.2.4 Analytically reflects to improve self-awareness and areas of strength/improvement.

3.2.5Questions and compares new and emerging technologies that support high quality and evidence-based neonatal care.

3.2.6 Incorporates digital literacy and capability into learning, supporting development of practice in neonatal care.

Supporting evidence

Standard 4: Comprehensively conducts assessments

4.1 Competent – 1-2 years

4.2.1Works in partnership with families to identify referral pathways and support resources based on holistic assessment.

4.2.2 Liaises with multidisciplinary team to ensure all aspects of assessment are considered and incorporates physical, cultural and psychosocial health needs.

4.2.3 Uses assessment findings to escalate care when neonatal deterioration suspected.

4.2.4 Assesses and initiates strategies to manage the environment for neurodevelopmental appropriateness.

Supporting evidence

Standard 5: Develops a plan for nursing practice

5.1 Competent – 1-2 years

5.2.1 Questions and evaluates existing plans independently to ensure identified priorities, actions and outcomes are progressing.

5.2.2 Organises, co-ordinates and manages strategies for implementation of individualised care plan.

Supporting evidence

Standard 6: Provides safe, appropriate, and responsive quality nursing practice

6.1 Competent – 1-2 years

6.2.1 Nursing practice is responsive to the family's emotional wellbeing and level of confidence: supporting their participation in caregiving, enhancing early bonding and attachment by providing education and encouragement.

6.2.2 Delivers planned care safely to meet the clinical goals for the neonate and integrating the family's care preferences.

6.2.3 Provides clear and consistent information to families as they transition to home or ongoing care, limiting the use of jargon or over-medicalised language

6.2.4 Assists family to develop responsiveness to their neonate's cues and developmental needs by encouraging skin-to-skin contact and by reading and singing.

Supporting evidence

Standard 7: Evaluates outcomes to inform practice

7.1 Competent – 1-2 years

7.2.1 Questions alterations to neonatal physiology when evaluating outcomes and adapts plan of care.

7.2.2 Monitors, evaluates, documents and communicates progress toward achieving expected milestone goals and clinical outcomes.

7.2.3 Identifies and questions quality improvement activities to promote improved outcomes.

Supporting evidence

Outcome

Meets expected standards ☐

Working towards expected standards ☐

Assessor's name: _____

Assessor's signature:_____

Date: _____

Collaborative discussion and feedback / strengths and areas to improve/ development plan: