

## The Description and Meaning of Clinical Competency: Perceptions of Nurse Faculty and Nurse Managers

**Carolyn D. Meehan, PhD, RN**

*School of Nursing, West Chester University, West Chester, PA, USA*

Despite the vital nature of the concept of clinical competency, especially in its relation to the quality of patient care that nurses provide, there is not a widely accepted understanding of the term between the theoretical and clinical groups in nursing. Consequently, there is a continuous struggle to set standards to measure clinical competency in undergraduate nursing students. This imprecise understanding of clinical competency widens the gap between education and practice. When prelicensure baccalaureate nursing faculty and acute care nurse managers share expectations of what constitutes clinical competency in nursing students, that gap may be bridged.

A shared understanding of the meaning of clinical competency through a qualitative interpretive descriptive study will help to delineate the meaning of clinical competency. Participants will include prelicensure baccalaureate nurse faculty and acute care nurse managers. The setting for this study will be mutually agreed upon and determined by the participants and the researcher. Data will be collected through semi-structured interviews with the participants, and analyzed through a constant comparative analysis.

Finding a clear, distinct, and concise understanding of what constitutes clinical competency in nursing students is critical to nursing science. It fosters a shared view of standards and performance that more clearly defines a vitally important term used in the process of evaluating nursing students by prelicensure baccalaureate nursing faculty and acute care nurse managers. Moreover, a consensus of the meaning of clinical competency will enable further research in nursing to establish the most objective means of measuring clinical competency in education and practice.

There are serious implications if a profession has uncertain standards. Ambiguity may lead to what Levett-Jones, Gesbach, Arthur, and Roche (2011) discussed as the nurse faculty's failure to fail. Without a consensus on the meaning of clinical competency, the interpretation of clinical competency may lead nurse faculty to pass students in the clinical area unless they are deemed unsafe or incompetent. This may also lead to disappointment from acute care nurse managers who expect more than a graduate nurse is prepared to provide. Larocque and Luhanga (2013) agreed that prelicensure baccalaureate nursing faculty's "fail to fail" student nurses in clinical practicum is owing to prelicensure baccalaureate nursing faculty's inability to define plainly what clinical competency means. This leaves nursing as a profession without an effective universal standard to evaluate the nursing student in practice.

Similarly, it is important to determine what understanding acute care nurse managers assign to the scope of preparation of new graduate nurses seeking employment. Acute care nurse managers in the practice area have expectations of new graduates, and their understanding of the meaning of clinical competency could assist in clarifying those expectations (Thomas, Ryan, & Hodson-Carlton, 2011). Collectively, understanding the meaning of clinical competency from the perspective of the prelicensure baccalaureate nursing faculty and the acute care nurse managers will contribute to objective evaluation and measurement in the future.

---

### **Title:**

The Description and Meaning of Clinical Competency: Perceptions of Nurse Faculty and Nurse Managers

**Keywords:**

Baccalaureate Nurse Faculty and Acute Care Nurse Managers, Clinical Competency and Interpretive Description Qualitative Research Study

**References:**

DeBrew, J. K., & Lewallen, L. P. (2014). To pass or to fail? Understanding the factors considered by faculty in the clinical evaluation of nursing students. *Nurse Education Today*, 34, 631-636. Ironside, P., & McNelis, A. M. (2011). Transforming clinical education. *Journal of Nursing Education*, 50, 123-124. Larocque, S., & Luhanga, F. L. (2013). Exploring the issue of failure to fail in a nursing program. *International Journal of Nursing Education Scholarship*, 10, 1-8. doi: 10.1515/ijnes-2012-0037.

**Abstract Summary:**

A shared understanding of the meaning of clinical competency through a qualitative interpretive descriptive study will help to delineate the meaning of clinical competency. Finding a clear, distinct, and concise understanding of what constitutes clinical competency in nursing students is critical to nursing science. It fosters a shared view of standards and performance that more clearly defines a vitally important term used in the process of evaluating nursing students by prelicensure baccalaureate nursing faculty and acute care nurse managers.

**Learning Activity:**

LEARNING OBJECTIVES	EXPANDED CONTENT OUTLINE
The learner will be able to understand the importance of discerning the meaning of clinical competency when evaluating the nursing student in the clinical area.	Poster presentation
The learner will recognize the distinctions and similarities of the meaning of clinical competency between baccalaureate nurse faculty and acute care nurse managers.	Poster presentation
The learner will be able to verbalize attributes of clinical competency that will carry over from the undergraduate clinical area to a nursing position in the acute care area.	Poster presentation

**Slot (superslotted):**

PST: Friday, April 8, 2016: 10:00 AM-10:45 AM

**Slot (superslotted):**

PST: Friday, April 8, 2016: 12:00 PM-1:15 PM

**Slot (superslotted):**

PST: Friday, April 8, 2016: 2:30 PM-3:15 PM

**Slot (superslotted):**

PST: Friday, April 8, 2016: 6:00 PM-7:00 PM

**Slot (superslotted):**

PST: Saturday, April 9, 2016: 7:30 AM-8:30 AM

**Slot (superslotted):**

PST: Saturday, April 9, 2016: 10:00 AM-10:45 AM

**Slot (superslotted):**

PST: Saturday, April 9, 2016: 12:00 PM-1:15 PM