Developing healthcare safety investigator competencies for a consensus study

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SUMMARY

There is a drive to professionalise healthcare safety investigators but there are currently no agreed core competencies. This paper describes the process of generating an initial set of competencies for healthcare safety investigators. The outputs formed the basis for a later consensus study.

KEYWORDS

Competencies, healthcare safety investigators

Introduction

Recent patient safety initiatives promote a systems approach to investigations (NHSE, 2022), but there is limited available resource from which to propose investigator competencies. Our wider study aimed to develop a competency framework for healthcare safety investigators in England. We report an early phase of the study in this paper: the development of an initial set of competencies for healthcare safety investigators, for later use in a consensus study.

Methods

Data source

We used existing interview data 'vignettes' from a project exploring the scope of a good and effective healthcare safety investigation. Interviews were conducted with 50 international and national safety specialists with varied expertise in contemporary healthcare safety investigations.

Analysis and competency development

Salient interview vignettes (n= 886), that varied in length (10-200 words), were analysed by two researchers with a varied background in healthcare, patient safety and human factors / ergonomics. For the first (approximate) third of interview vignettes (n=316), each researcher independently created 'competency descriptors' (i.e. describing a practice or quality of an investigator). These competency descriptors were discussed in depth to reach agreement. Thereafter, for the remaining vignettes (n=570), either researcher proposed competency descriptors for consideration by the other. Differing interpretations were resolved through discussions.

The competency descriptors (n=1214) were then grouped by meaning and application. These were informed by the relevant literature (e.g. Lester, 2014; Nixon and Braithwaite, 2018). Four distinct 'domains' were developed (see Table one), with subsidiary 'domain areas' (n=9) and 40 draft competencies (aggregates of the competency descriptors). The emphasis upon, and scope, of 'Personal qualities' and 'Effective and compassionate engagement' were noted for this role.

Results

Table one shows the draft competencies for healthcare safety investigators.

Table 1: Draft investigator competencies for use in the consensus study

Domain (n=4)	Domain area (n=9)	Draft competencies (n=40)		
Personal qualities	Inherent characteristics	Is empathic	Is inquisitive	Is rigorous
	Professional identity	Demonstrates knowledge in healthcare safety investigation		
		Invests in own professional development		
		Supports development of knowledge in investigation practice		
		Is perceived as a credible professional		
		Promotes team-working		
	Ethical practice	Demonstrates integrity	Demonstrates diplomacy	
		Reflects on the impact of their own expertise and experiences		
		Is sensitive and responsive to the needs of investigation participants		
		Seeks and offers peer review		
		Demonstrates independence		
		Maintains confidentiality		
Investigation knowledge and skill application	Demonstrates core knowledge and understanding of:	The investigation context		
		Complex healthcare systems		
		Principles core to a healthcare safety investigation		
		Principles of engagement		
		Principles of just culture		
	Investigation practice: Demonstrates applied skills as an investigator to:	Plan, prepare and review the design of an investigation		
		Use systems-based investigation methodologies		
		Use investigation methods and techniques		
		Collect investigation data		
		Analyse and interpret data		
		Develop recommendations		
		Report the investigation		
		Assure quality of investigation integrity		
Effective and compassionate engagement	Being supportive of people involved in an investigation	Demonstrates insight into the experiences of others		
		Manages care of those involved in an investigation		
	Meaningful engagement with people	Prepares for engagement		
		Engages intentionally and genuinely with people		
	Promotes engagement through interview practice	Prepares and supports interviewees		
		Conducts the interview		
	Writes for the audience	Tailors written materials for the user		

Manages investigation lifecycles	Identifies opportunities to learn from reported incidents	Manages data
	Uses established investigation protocols	Schedules work and manages time
	Monitors and measures the impact of investigation outputs	

Key learning points from this process

To our knowledge, this draft competency framework is the first of its kind for healthcare safety investigators globally. The study demonstrates the rich outputs that can be gained from secondary data analysis. For later use in a consensus study, the outputs allow for review and further development by and for healthcare safety investigation stakeholders in England.

References

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