

Joint statement on employment of clinical physiologists

The Department of Health, NHS Employers and the Registration Council for Clinical Physiology (RCCP) have agreed joint work on the issue of regulation of clinical physiologists. In the meantime, whilst we await the arrangements for statutory regulation to be put in place and in order to mitigate risk, the following statement sets out a solution for employers. This is similar to other such earlier statements for other staff groups, for example, clinical perfusionists and operating department practitioners.

Summary and action required

While provision is being made for clinical physiologists to gain statutory regulation, employers are asked to ensure that the employment of healthcare scientists known as clinical physiologists and practising in the areas¹ of:

- respiratory physiology
- neurophysiology
- gastro-intestinal physiology
- cardiac physiology
- audiology and hearing therapy

is limited to those whose names appear on the voluntary register held by the RCCP and that any practitioner not so registered is appropriately supervised. The degree of supervision should be determined by the departmental manager in collaboration with the clinical director and other members of the team. When considering the level of supervision, employers should take into consideration the individual's relevant experience, training and competency to deliver patient care as many long-term staff will not require supervision.

¹ There may be clinical scientists working in these areas and they should be on the register held by the Health Professions Council.

This guidance applies equally to:

- staff employed in the private and voluntary sector and who provide services on your behalf to patients and clients
- staff supplied to you by employment agencies
- staff working as bank staff.

You should ensure that for your own protection that your arrangements for the provision of such services are confined to organisations complying with these requirements.

Action

You are asked to ensure that:

- those already employed as clinical physiologists but who are not currently on the register maintained by the RCCP are supported and encouraged to take the necessary steps to gain registration
- locum and bank staff are also registered with the RCCP before they take up any duties
- healthcare scientists in clinical physiology working in hospitals in the independent sector and providing services for NHS patients are appropriately registered.

You are asked to involve locally recognised trades unions and staff representative groups in the implementation of this guidance, and to draw this circular to the attention of the relevant service managers.

Background

Healthcare scientists working in the fields of clinical physiology in respiratory physiology, neurophysiology, gastro-intestinal physiology, cardiac physiology and audiology and hearing therapy are members of teams which investigate the functioning of major organ systems to diagnose abnormalities, and find ways to restore function and/or reduce the disabling consequences to the patient. They will be working in hospital clinics and departments or as part of a medical, surgical or diagnostic team in the community.

While the often used titles of

- respiratory physiologists
- neurophysiologist
- gastro-intestinal physiologist
- cardiac physiologist
- audiologist and hearing therapist

may be attached to posts by employers, neither the titles nor the activities of these employees is regulated by law. A system of voluntary regulation is however operated by RCCP.

The RCCP maintains a non-statutory register of competent practitioners and seeks to promote high standards and additional safeguards through its codes of conduct and associated disciplinary mechanisms, details of which can be found at <http://fp.clinphys.f9.co.uk/>.

Accreditation by a relevant overarching professional body is an important indicator for employers of competence and suitability. All NHS employers are required to ensure that their employees are qualified and competent to perform the duties for which they are employed and do not represent a risk to patients, colleagues or themselves. This duty includes ensuring that high standards of patient care are maintained at all times.

Education and training

The RCCP Professional Bodies Education Committee (PBEC) was established in 2002 and has representation from the Association for Respiratory Technology and Physiology (ARTP), Association of GI Physiology (AGIP), Association of Neurophysiological Scientists (ANS) previously, Electro-Physiological Technicians Association (EPTA) and the Society for Cardiological Science and Technology (SCST). Audiology and Hearing Therapy, (BAAT and BSHT) are about to come on board.

The remit of PBEC is:

- accreditation and ongoing monitoring of pre-registration education provision (both generic and specialist modules)
- liaison with education providers in the provision of professional body practical examinations
- providing advice to all institutions offering qualifying courses in clinical physiology
- setting, maintaining and the raising of standards.

From 1 September 2009 the relevant national vocational qualification will be the BSc (Hons) Clinical Physiology and accredited degree (which will include the professional body's exams). A full list of all the basic qualifications for employment for practitioners and the basic educational requirement for membership of the RCCP and inclusion in its register prior to 1 September 2009 can be found at <http://fp.clinphys.f9.co.uk/RCCPPBEC.htm>.

Registration is available to practitioners who can prove that they have acquired the recognised academic qualifications and assessment of competence for application to the voluntary register.

Grandparenting arrangements

However, if you currently employ healthcare scientists in clinical physiology disciplines who do not possess the basic educational requirement and are not on the register, you are asked to encourage them to approach RCCP. They will offer advice on grandparenting arrangements for those with the required evidence of competent and safe practitioners to be registered based on qualifications and experience.

European and overseas qualifications

RCCP will also provide an advisory service to employers wishing to engage practitioners who are nationals from European Economic Area countries or who have enforceable Community rights or practitioners with other overseas qualifications. They will assess an individual's qualifications and experience, registering those who meet the required standard and advising others of any deficiency, and the training or practice required to qualify for registration.

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