Advisory to medical laboratory assistant programs re: competency attainment in the clinical setting (critical criterion 3.5)

Background
Guidelines published by Conjoint Accreditation Services in 2010 describe the expectations related to student attainment of competencies listed in the Canadian Society for Medical Laboratory Science (CSMLS) medical laboratory assistant (MLA) competency profile. An excerpt from the 2010 guidelines is as follows:

“MLA programs are required to provide students with timely and equitable clinical placements, but there is no specified length for the placement. Each program is expected to design a curriculum that enables students to attain all competencies of the CSMLS competency profile and demonstrate their attainment in the clinical setting. Clinical/practicum learning opportunities are in the actual practice setting of the profession (hospital or clinic). The program consults the national competency profile for the profession to determine any direction or latitude regarding the attainment of certain competencies in environments other than the actual practice setting. Every effort should be made to maximize the student's clinical experience but it is recognized that it may not be feasible for the student to perform all entry-level competencies in actual clinical situations.”

Current situation
MLA programs assess some competencies in the clinical environment. However, most programs use the simulation environment to validate attainment of the majority of the competencies in the national profile. Maximizing attainment of competencies in the clinical setting is not occurring.

As indicated above, to fully meet critical criterion 3.5, programs must provide students with the opportunity to demonstrate all competencies in the clinical environment. If some select competencies cannot be attained in the clinical environment, sound rationale for the choice must be provided for assessment in the simulated environment. Final validation of competency attainment in the simulated environment must be the exception rather than the rule.

For more information on critical criterion 3.5, refer to the 2014 Requirements for accreditation handbook available at cma.ca/accredit.

Reporting requirements (see also Addendum)
- For registered programs with a scheduled visit in 2014, allowances will be made in assessing the program against criterion 3.5. These programs will however be subject to the December 31, 2016 reporting requirement listed below, i.e., demonstration that competency attainment is occurring in the clinical setting.

Registered programs with a scheduled visit in 2015 or later must demonstrate that students attain the competencies in the clinical setting. If a program with a visit scheduled in 2015 needs more time to implement the changes, it may ask for a deferral of the visit; no additional fee will be levied for this exceptional situation. Programs wishing a deferral must notify Conjoint Accreditation Services by May 31, 2014.
• Currently accredited programs must take appropriate action, as required, to provide the students with opportunities to attain the competencies in the clinical setting. A report must be submitted to Conjoint Accreditation Services by December 31, 2016. The report must include evidence that students are assessed and attain the competencies in the clinical setting. Evidence would include such documents as:
  o a list of current clinical placement sites
  o the volume and variety of work at the placement sites (template 3B can be used)
  o student rotation plans for the latest cohort, and,
  o student records (completed clinical evaluation forms) that demonstrate students are assessed and attained the competencies in the clinical environment (Note: if some competencies are not assessed in the clinical environment, sound rationale as for the choice of another environment must be provided.

For more information
Contact Conjoint Accreditation Services at accreditation@cma.ca or visit cma.ca/accredit.

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ADDENDUM

Update on evidence required for the December 31, 2016 report

Criterion 3.5 relates to opportunities for attainment of competencies in the appropriate setting, i.e., in the clinical environment. As indicated above, attainment of competencies should occur in the clinical environment, with attainment of competencies in the simulated environment the exception rather than the rule.

Student records could contribute to the confirmation that the opportunities for competency attainment in the clinical setting are available. However, student records are generally assessed as evidence for criterion 1.5 (attainment of competencies) and not 3.5 (opportunities for competency attainment).

Since this is a report on criterion 3.5, submitting student records is no longer required as evidence.

Conjoint Accreditation Services has reviewed the requirements for the December 31, 2016 reporting process for currently accredited MLA programs, and has determined that the following evidence will be sufficient:
  • a list of current clinical placement sites
  • the volume and variety of work at the placement sites (template 3B can be used)
  • student rotation plans for the two most recent cohorts

Please note that student records are no longer required for this reporting process.