

European Dietetic Advanced Competences (EDAC)

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This document is aimed to dietitians in Europe and written by the Work Package ‘*Second and third cycle competences for dietitians*’ of the Thematic Network of Dietitians (DIETS2, www.thematicnetworkdietetics.eu). The document will help us to better understand the competences required by dietitians who work or will work at advanced/ specialist level in Europe.

The paper is arranged as follows:

- Introduction
- Glossary of Terms
- Proposed Advanced Competence Framework

Introduction

Going from a newly qualified dietitian to an advanced level requires higher levels of knowledge and skills, as it includes significantly more demanding and complex work together with higher levels of responsibility and professional judgment. One of the European Federation of the Associations of Dietitians (EFAD) goals is to support the National Dietetic Associations (NDA’S) to reduce inequalities and improve nutritional health in Europe. Part of this includes developing standards of competence at different levels of dietetic practice.

In 2009, EFAD adopted the European Dietetic Competences and Performance Indicators (PIs) at a threshold level for entry into the profession (EFAD, 2005, www.efad.org). Thereafter the profession and higher education institutions (HEI) in Europe began a process to ensure that all dietitians qualifying from their programmes have achieved these competences.

The European Union is committed to the prevention and control of non-communicable diseases (EC 2007 & 2011) through more healthful nutrition and increased physical activity. Dietitians as nutrition experts can further advance their profession, their professional expertise and, working as autonomous professionals, support their user groups and other healthcare professionals regarding healthful human nutrition.

Within the current context of Europe, the development of competence statements for dietitians post-qualifying is therefore highly relevant and important for the profession to support the achievement and implementation of these Resolutions and White papers. In addition and bearing in mind that the key ambitions of the Thematic Network for Dietitians (DIETS2) are:

- ✓ To prepare dietitians to be able to undertake and evaluate health promoting interventions and publish findings (enquiry led-learning)
- ✓ To support dietitians to develop and use contemporary communication and pedagogic/education methods (ICT)
- ✓ To enable dietitians to continually enhance their own expertise and relevance through lifelong learning (LLL)

This paper defines the competences highly qualified dietitians should be able to reach after “some years” of practical experience combined with continued education and other experiences of Lifelong Learning (LLL). Practical work experience is essential to improve competence, but years in practice are not enough by themselves to reach advanced level. *How* a dietitian works and what LLL-experiences the individual chooses to undertake will be crucial in the process (see Figure 1). It is possible to work many years as an adequate and competent dietitian without reaching advanced level.

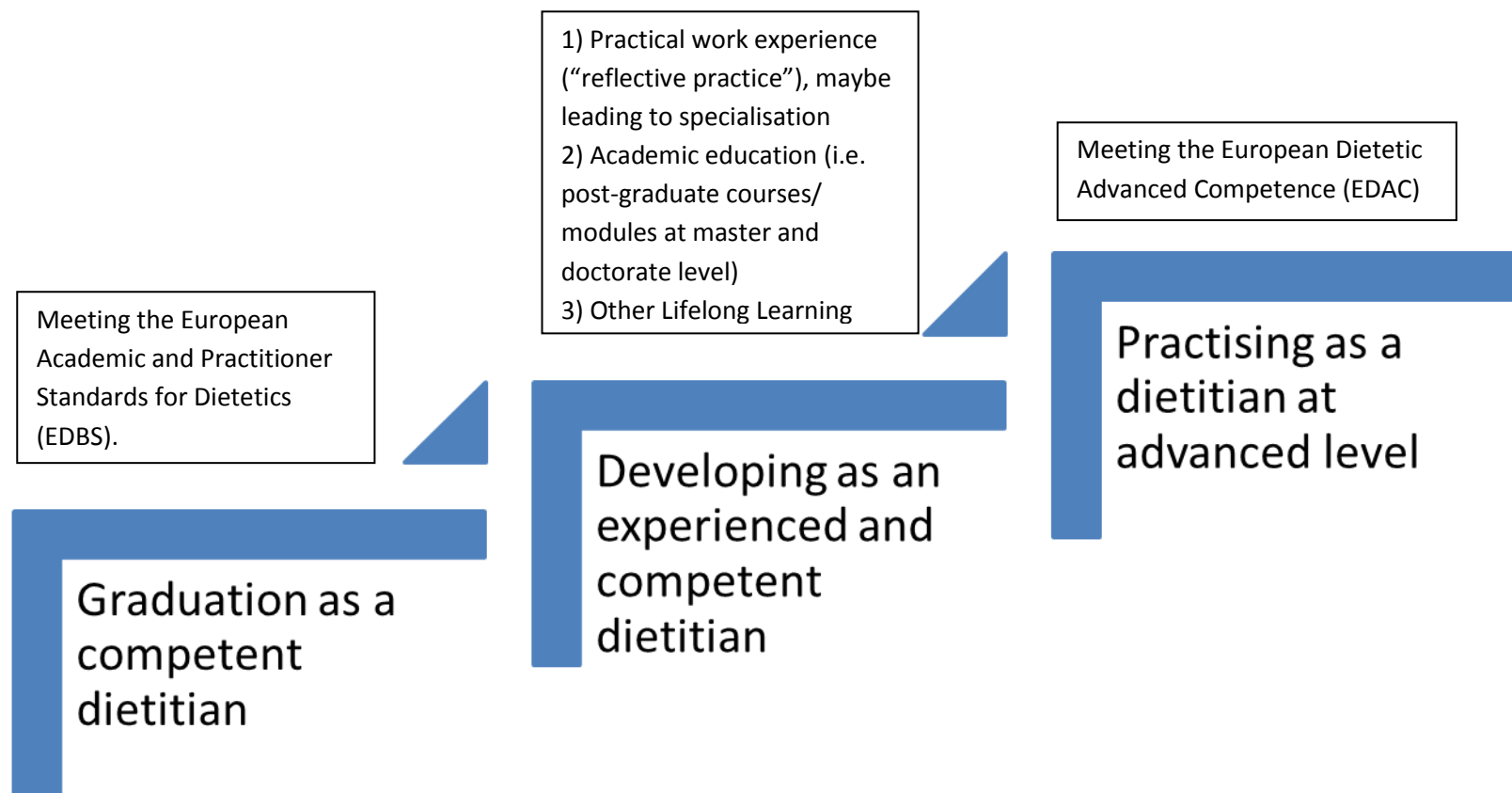


Figure 1. Flowchart over the progression from newly graduated dietitian to a dietitian practicing at advanced level, indicating standards to be met at the two levels and the experience required to reach the higher level.

An advanced practice or specialist dietitian will be one who is able to demonstrate they meet the advanced competence standards by drawing on a wide range of evidence. The evidence can be gained from professionally recognized programmes of study, for example a degree at Masters level or equivalent, or by using a competency-based assessment process. Other approaches may also be used to demonstrate commitment to evidence-based practice to meet the advanced competence standards.

Exactly which of the competences described in this EDAC-document a dietitian has to reach and which performance indicators (PIs) they have to be able to show before being regarded as working at advanced level will be determined by their National Dietetic Associations (NDAs) and national legislation. The EDAC-document also provides a benchmark for monitoring development of the profession in Europe as opportunities are introduced for Lifelong Learning. It also presents a challenge to Higher Education, the Professional Bodies and individual learners to consider how they can support, through educational programmes and more informal means, the advancement of their colleagues, learners and themselves.

Acknowledgment

The authors of this paper gratefully acknowledge the use of several competence statements from the publications listed at the end of this paper.

Glossary of terms

<p><i>Advanced practice (practice at advanced level)</i></p>	<p>Advanced practice can take place in either a general or a specialist field. Terms associated with advanced practice are 'higher levels of knowledge and skill', 'significantly more demanding', 'higher levels of responsibility and judgment', 'more complex procedures' etc. Advanced practice is underpinned by advanced reasoning.</p> <p>Advanced practice results from an expanded and specialized knowledge set, skills, competence, and experience. Expansion refers to the acquisition of new practice knowledge and skills, including the knowledge and skills that legitimize role autonomy within areas of practice that may overlap the traditional boundaries within dietetics practice.</p> <p>Advanced level practice is characterized by the integration of a broad range of unique theoretical, research-based, and practical knowledge that occurs as a part of training and experience beyond entry level and is shaped by the context in which the dietitian practices (ADA).</p>
<p><i>Advanced practitioner/specialist</i></p>	<p>Denotes a level of practice, often within a specialty, that is more advanced than the competences associated with initial registration, or with simply working in a specialty requiring different approaches (e.g. primary care at community level, elder care, rehabilitation homes or in hospital). The specialist's role encompasses professional expertise, teaching, evaluation and practice/service development. In some countries in Europe a title Specialist Dietitian has been proposed or implemented for dietitians working as advanced practitioners in an area of specialisation. A specialist may also be considered an expert.</p>

<i>Competence</i>	<p>A competence defines WHAT a person is capable of doing well, effectively and following professional standards</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - competence is an outcome: it describes what someone can do. It does not describe the learning process which the individual has undergone - in order to reliably measure someone's ability to do something, there must be clearly defined and widely accessible standards through which performance is measured and accredited; - competence is a measure of what someone can do at a particular point in time. (UDACE 1989; Tight 1996) 	
<i>Competency(ies)</i>	<p>The focus is concentrated on the learners and their actions rather than upon predetermined products or it can mean active participation through learning (Smith 1996, 2005). Learning programmes (in Higher Education or elsewhere) are therefore competency based programmes. Programmes in Europe will use the Dublin Descriptors (Bologna, 2004) to guide their development.</p>	
<i>Dietitian</i>	<p>The European Federation of the Associations of Dietitians (EFAD) and the International Congress of Dietetic Associations (ICDA) define a dietitian is a person with a legally recognised qualification (in nutrition and dietetics) who applies the science of nutrition to the feeding and education of groups of people and individuals in health and disease.</p>	
	Administrative dietitian	<p>A dietitian with an education in nutrition and dietetics focused on food service management with responsibility for feeding of groups of people in health and disease in an institution or a community.</p>
	Clinical dietitian	<p>A dietitian with an education focused on clinical nutrition and dietetics with responsibility for dietary prevention and treatment of groups and individuals in an institution or a community.</p>
	General dietitian	<p>A dietitian with a basic education (but not a specialisation) in both clinical nutrition and dietetics and food service management with overall responsibilities for both aspects in an institution or a community.</p>
	Public health or community dietitian	<p>A dietitian directly involved in health promotion and policy formulation that leads to the promotion of food choice amongst individuals and groups to improve or maintain their nutritional health and minimize risk from nutritionally derived illness.</p>
<i>Expert</i>	<p>An expert is a person with extensive knowledge, skills or ability based on research and experience in a particular area of study i.e. Dietetics.</p>	
<i>Performance</i>	<p>The performance indicator (PI) tells HOW a person performs a specific activity.</p>	

<i>indicator (PI)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A 'PI' is a tool to assess a person's ability to perform a specific task - The PI's enable assessment of a person's performance in range of tasks that contribute towards a defined competence. - Together the PI's specify the level of performance required to achieve and define a Competence
<i>Proficiency</i>	Ability to adapt and apply knowledge and skills over a wide range of situations
Specialisation/field of interest	<p>Specialisation is focusing to part of the field of dietetics (eg, administrative dietetics, ambulatory care, long-term care, diabetes, renal, paediatric, private practice, public health, nutrition support, research, sports nutrition).</p> <p>The dietitian may work at a basic or advanced level within the specialised field but to achieve advanced status the criteria for European Dietetic Advanced Competence must be demonstrated.</p>

Proposed Competence Framework

The *European Dietetic Advanced Competences (EDAC)* provide the baseline of knowledge, skills, understanding and competence of a Dietitian working as a dietetic practitioner at advanced and specialist level in Europe.

The European Dietetic Academic and Practitioner Standards (2005) recognised the major fields of Dietitians employed in Europe. However working at advanced and/or specialist levels will require the dietitian to be flexible, innovative and a proactive leader who integrates high-level nutrition and dietetic skills to influence the health of the community. At this level it is inappropriate to specify particular competences for every specialist area eg renal or diabetes, although some competences will be more applicable to some specialist areas than others. Over time it may be appropriate for specialist groups of dietitians to augment these EDAC standards with specifics from their own specialty to legitimize role autonomy. Examples are provided using the following colour notations:

Generic Advanced Dietetics – black text – applicable for all Dietitians in all working environments

Specific to Administrative Dietetics – identified by blue text

Specific to Clinical Dietetics – identified by red text

Specific to Public Health or Community Dietetics – identified by green text

It is recognised that where highly specialised roles are undertaken e.g. in paediatric or renal disease dietetics more specific competences will be added. It is also recognised that although some competences are colour coded this does not mean that only a specific named working environment defines the dietitian's competence.

Some Member States may wish to set their competence standards (or standards of proficiency) at a higher level for their Dietitians. *These competences are set at a baseline level for dietitians working at advanced level.*

Competence	<p>1.0 Advanced knowledge and understanding of Dietetics</p> <p>Constantly interprets knowledge base to display a deep and systematic understanding of the theoretical and methodological approaches to a relevant field of dietetic practice and through this advances professional dietetics.</p>
Performance indicators	<p>Knowledge, skills and application applicable to all field of dietetics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Demonstrates an extensive depth and breadth of knowledge in a defined area or specialist field of dietetic practice b) Maintains a critical knowledge of up-to-date best practice guidelines and best policy statements c) Applies advanced knowledge to synthesis new and innovative theories and approaches, demonstrating originality and leadership in dietetic practice d) Demonstrates high level skill in the application of knowledge to complex dietetic matters and specific dietetic approaches to affect the eating behaviour of an individual within his/her environment and communicates this in an easily understandable way. Demonstrates a deep knowledge and understanding of health inequalities when deciding how to develop methods for supporting or providing dietetic interventions to individuals or groups. e) Has a critical knowledge of nutritional screening and assessment tools adapted to specific client groups f) Demonstrates a systematic understanding of the relevant government legislation as it affects dietetic practice <p><i>Additional performance indicators specific to administrative dietitians:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> g) Demonstrates a systematic understanding of the relevant government legislation and different meal service systems to plan, produce and serve meals according to laws, regulations and policies (blue) h) Has an extensive knowledge and critical understanding of dietetic and catering practices that influence hygiene and traceability to improve service standards (blue) <p><i>Additional performance indicators specific to clinical dietitians:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) Has an extensive knowledge and critical understanding of complex co-morbidities, social inequalities and food choice to justify dietetic action, in relevant dietetic settings (red)

Competence	<p>2.0 Dietetic Process and Professional Reasoning</p> <p>2.1 Demonstrates an ability to reflect on own practice to synthesis innovative solutions, applications and ideas</p> <p>2.2 Creatively applies knowledge of the Dietetic Process in complex situations, unpredictable or unfamiliar contexts and, where appropriate, in a specialist context</p>
Performance indicators	<p>Knowledge, skills and application applicable to all field of dietetics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Able to manage complex problems and case-loads creatively, through rapid assessment and synthesis of information within the practice context b) Shows a critical awareness and understanding of competing patient/client priorities when dealing with complex cases within a particular field of dietetic practice c) Able to apply a critical ethical dimension to practice to justify strategies adopted for the prevention of health inequalities d) Demonstrates the use of advanced skills in advocacy and negotiations in dietetic practice e) Understands and applies biostatistics where relevant to a specialist field and is able to apply this in practice f) Able to make unpopular but evidence-based appropriate decisions g) Understands and values cultural preferences, health beliefs and behaviours and challenges inequalities h) Critically evaluates own practice and systematically draws on published evidence to inform practice and justify the rationale for an innovative dietetic approach i) Employs critical evaluation to assess progress, impact and outcomes of nutrition interventions j) Applies high level critical reasoning to monitor the effectiveness of dietetic care to provide evidence that the nutrition plan/intervention is achieving planned outcomes thereby justifying any further action <p><i>Additional performance indicators for clinical dietitians:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> k) Synthesizes best available evidence to inform and prioritizes the nutrition diagnoses based on the severity of problem, the likelihood that nutrition intervention will impact the problem, and patient's perception of importance. (red)

	<p>l) The ability to demonstrate an 'extended intervention role as appropriate to the specialist area of advanced practice (red)</p> <p><i>Additional performance indicators for public health dietitians:</i></p> <p>m) Able to integrate, synthesize and communicate knowledge about structures in public health and social services at local, national, European and international level to justify strategies adopted for prevention of health inequalities (green)</p> <p>n) Able to operate in an unpredictable and complex environment to promote and apply the local governance agenda to dietetic practice (green)</p> <p>o) Apply a critical understanding of the value of epidemiological information, especially that which is based on local data, when planning care (green)</p>
Competence	<p>3.0 Professional Relationships</p> <p>Demonstrates advanced communication skills to engage effectively in professional relationships with clients, professional colleagues, policy and decision makers in a variety of settings, to establish clear and appropriate actions and outcomes.</p>
Performance indicators	<p>Knowledge, skills and application applicable to all field of dietetics</p> <p>a) Exhibits a deep awareness of cultural diversity with recognition that cultural differences enrich Dietetic practice and also demonstrates equality of care</p> <p>b) Acts as role model for personal conduct when dealing with diversity and difference; educates, advises and guides less experienced team members and other stakeholders</p> <p>c) Identifies and manages ethical dilemmas that arise within professional relationships and ensures ethical principles (see EFAD or national ethical guidelines) are adhered to within own practice</p> <p>d) Encourages, inspires and works with others; actively seeking collaboration for inter-disciplinary work</p> <p>e) Has local, national, (international), and policy-making network connections in the Dietetic and related fields</p> <p>f) Seeks opportunities to engage in the management of networks to promote professional practice through enhanced communication</p>

	<p>g) Works as an effective member of a multi-professional/multi-agency team (eg medical, social, private enterprise and public bodies) contributing to evidence-based practices and policies of the team</p> <p>h) Can apply skills in counselling and interview techniques e.g. motivational, to support and influence people that dietitians work with including patients/clients, other health care professionals and co-workers</p> <p><i>Additional performance indicators for clinical dietitians:</i></p> <p>i) Creates a climate of mutual trust and establishes partnerships with patient/clients, carers and families to encourage active choices and participation in care and treatment (red)</p> <p>j) Demonstrates the flexibility to provide support when a need is identified and a sensitive awareness of the clients need for autonomy when less support is appropriate (red)</p> <p>k) Demonstrates advanced communication skills to practice a client-centred approach, including knowledge of client's expectations and respect for individual differences and their influence on dietary and lifestyle habits (red)</p>
Competence	<p>4.0 Professional Autonomy and Accountability</p> <p>Demonstrates the ability to apply own initiatives to decision making and problem solving, within ethical and professional guidelines, accepting full accountability for outcome of own actions.</p>
Performance indicators	<p>Knowledge, skills and application applicable to all field of dietetics</p> <p>a) Constantly uses personal reflection to evaluate self-performance and demonstrate advancement to dietetic practice</p> <p>b) Has pro-active role in recognition of mal-practice and is partner in decisions regarding mal-practice</p> <p>c) Demonstrates responsibility for own professional development by actively engaging in Life Long Learning to support advancing dietetic practice</p> <p>d) Creates a culture of continuing development within own workplace through acting as a role model for others</p> <p>e) Reflects on skills and creates opportunities to own further development</p> <p>f) Leads on the development of local, national and international policies, regulations and codes of ethics for Dietitians to promote professional excellence</p>

	<p><i>Additional performance indicators for clinical dietitians</i></p> <p>g) Demonstrates autonomous practice and full accountability for the care of clients, in assessment, clinical reasoning, treatment and intervention by maintaining clear, accurate and timely records of practice (red)</p>
Competence	<p>5.0 Educator Skills</p> <p>5.1 Demonstrates responsibility to contribute to the education and training of patients/clients, students, dietitians, and other health professionals.</p> <p>5.2 Demonstrates ability to prepare and present educational material through the critical evaluation and synthesis of relevant information to meet learning outcomes in appropriate settings and using effective media.</p>
Performance indicators	<p>Knowledge, skills and application applicable to all field of dietetics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Has an extensive knowledge and critical understanding of effective educational methods and pedagogy to influence the behaviour of individuals and groups, as well as students and other professionals b) Uses educational techniques to empower patients/clients, students, professionals and other people to identify their potential and seek out opportunities to improve nutritional health and reduce inequalities c) Ensures that individuals are encouraged and supported, wherever possible, to be self-sufficient in managing their own educational or health related needs d) Facilitates learning in practice, mentoring and coaching to promote a positive learning environment for students and other relevant professionals e) Able to perform a systematic literature review to critically appraise current evidence and synthesize an informed strategy, to teach best practice for a specific dietetic question f) Creates a culture of challenge and support where critical feedback is received positively and mistakes are regarded as learning opportunities g) Provides positive critical feedback, coaches team members to enhance their performance and clarify their roles and responsibilities h) Initiates, manages and demonstrates exemplary supervisory skills within dietetic practice and supports the development of supervision skills in others (students, colleagues and other professionals)

Competence	<p>6.0 Research and Development in Dietetics and its Science</p> <p>6.1 Demonstrates a critical understanding of methodological approaches to scientific investigation and skills necessary for evidence informed practice.</p> <p>6.2 Enables the design and implementation of a substantial audit or research project to address and inform significant and specific areas of practice.</p>
Performance indicators	<p>Knowledge, skills and application applicable to all field of dietetics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Able to critically reflect on current literature in a defined area or specialist field of practice, to develop relevant research questions b) Able to perform a systematic literature review to critically appraise current evidence and synthesize an informed strategy, to implement evidence-based best practice for a specific dietetic question c) Demonstrates the application of skills of enquiry and a systematic research approach to problem solving, identifying solutions and promoting development in dietetics d) Has a critical knowledge and understanding of methods of research enquiry, project design and data analysis to enable service evaluation and evidence informed practice through research and audit e) Engages actively in research projects within the dietetic field f) Engages in writing professional, reasoned and scientific articles for peer reviewed journals within the dietetic field
Competence	<p>7.0 Leadership and management of professional dietetics</p> <p>Demonstrates effective leadership and management skills of self and others through support and promotion of team dynamics, recognition of excellence in others and an ability to resolve conflict before it escalates.</p>
Performance indicators	<p>Knowledge, skills and application applicable to all field of dietetics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Recognizes the need to strategically manage change, taking account of organizational and service delivery needs b) Demonstrates an ability to integrate skills in leadership and management with resources (financial, human, physical and/or material resources) to prioritize and manage complex and conflicting priorities, to handle

	<p>complex problems</p> <p>c) Demonstrates management skills especially with respect to risk management and financial security, budgetary and resource management</p> <p>d) Sets expectations and procedures for delivery of service and advises peers and less experienced members of staff on expectations and procedures</p> <p>e) Creates and effectively communicates a vision, core values, institutional and disciplinary policy/practice, and strategy for successful service development and dietetic promotion</p> <p>f) Complies with human resource policies / procedures and collective agreements in managing the performance of others. <i>May include: employees, dietetic interns, students, volunteers, teams</i></p> <p>g) Sets challenges to build and develops confidence in others and manages the over-confident</p>
Competence	<p>8.0 Entrepreneurial skills and business development of dietetics</p> <p>Demonstrates ability to apply a high level of critical thinking and innovation to develop new concepts and approaches for identified opportunities within a 'business' environment using dietetics and nutrition.</p>
Performance indicators	<p>Knowledge, skills and application applicable to all field of dietetics</p> <p>a) Undertakes analysis to understand the user requirements and creates a plan, strategy or policy taking due account of the ethical responsibilities of the dietitian</p> <p>b) Fosters a culture of enquiry that is supportive and facilitative, encouraging creativity and innovation</p> <p>c) Performs advanced organizational and strategic service planning to implement reasoned service delivery</p> <p>d) Is influential in setting standards and devising criteria to define the skills required of dietitians in different fields</p> <p>e) Ensures that a dietetic perspective is achieved in the multi-professional/multi-agency delivery of care</p> <p>f) Uses health management skills to affect health policies locally, nationally and internationally</p>

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