



Residents: Top things you should know about Competence Committees

What is a Competence Committee?

With the launch of the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada's new approach to competency-based education, known as Competence by Design (CBD), we introduce the important concept of a Competence Committee. A Competence Committee reports to, and is a subcommittee of, the Residency Program Committee (RPC). A Competence Committee has two vitally important functions that directly affect your experience as a resident in a CBD program:

1. Competence Committees make decisions about residents' competence on clinical tasks using qualitative and quantitative data from multiple observations of their performance across multiple forms of assessment (including entrustable professional activities [EPAs], ITERS, OSCEs etc). A Competence Committee looks for patterns of progress over time, which is why residents, like you, should ask for your EPAs to be observed across contexts, by multiple observers, on many occasions. Staff can also trigger an EPA assessment. As CBD is rolling out, we are seeing that many residents are focusing a lot of their attention on EPA observations, which is understandable. Remember, though, that EPA decisions are only ONE important part of an overall program of assessment in CBD. They may be other forms of assessment used such as exams, multi-source feedback, log books, iTER's or evaluations from rounds/teaching session. This will vary with different programs.
2. Competence Committees make recommendations to their RPC on the status of a resident's progress. These status recommendations are based on holistic assessments of the resident's overall progress toward achieving competence in their stage of training (i.e., achieving the milestones for that stage). Recommendations can be informed by data from many sources, including EPA observations, narrative assessments, summaries of daily clinical performance, in-training examinations, OSCEs and simulation sessions.

Competence Committees operate with a growth mindset. This means that committee work is done in the spirit of supporting you and your fellow trainees to each achieve your own path to competence. By monitoring your overall progress, the Competence Committee can modify your learning plan to suit your needs. You should have a meeting with your academic coach or program director to discuss the outcome of the Competence Committee meeting and review your progress. The committee will identify if/when you are having trouble meeting expected milestones and help arrange support and coaching for you. (Please note that individual learning plans are created for *all* residents, whether they are struggling or excelling, to help them meet their learning needs.)

Who is part of the Competence Committee and what are their roles?

It is important to note that there is no single way to set up and run a Competence Committee. If you want specific details on how your program's Competence Committee(s) is (are) run, check with your program director (PD). Generally speaking, a Competence Committee includes a chair and at least 2 other members; the size will depend on the size of the program and the number of residents (guidelines suggest 1 faculty member per 8–10 residents). The PD, or a delegate, usually participates as a committee member. Terms of reference and procedures are determined by policies established at the university, with [guidance from the Royal College](#) (see the Royal College's Competence Committee Guidelines: [Terms of Reference](#) and [Process and Procedures in Decision Making](#)). The table below provides a typical list of the committee members* and their roles:

Member	Role
Chair	Develops schedule for meetings; develops agenda; moderates discussion and keeps time during meeting; reports to Residency Program Committee
Member	Reviews assigned resident portfolio(s) before meeting; presents portfolio(s) at meeting; contributes to the discussion on all residents
PD or delegate	Reviews Competence Committee decisions and recommendations with individual residents (usually also participates as a member of the committee)

** Membership varies from one school to another. For example, in some institutions, a program administrator may participate in committee meetings. Similarly, some committees have resident members, but this is not common.*

How often will my progress be reviewed?

Every trainee in the program must be discussed at least twice per year; however, when feasible, greater frequency of monitoring is desirable. Regular review of your progress will help guide your learning and facilitate a developmental approach to your training. You may also be scheduled for review if/when you are eligible for promotion, you have completed the requirements for your stage of training, you are deemed ready to sit the Royal College exam, a concern is flagged, or there is any significant delay or acceleration in your progress or academic performance.

The chair of the committee, the PD or their delegate develops the schedule for reviewing residents. Committee members review the files and prepare for the discussion. Your program will have its own policies outlining how and when it will notify you about these reviews.

What is the process for a review? How are decisions about EPA achievement made?

Members of the Competence Committee serve as primary reviewers of a selected number of resident portfolios per meeting. This ensures that each resident's portfolio is given a thorough review before the meeting. At the meeting, the primary reviewer presents their synthesis, displays relevant reports from the resident's portfolio, shares important quotes from any observational comments about the resident and benchmarks the resident's performance against national specialty

committee guidelines. As part of this review process, the committee has a group discussion and makes decisions about EPA achievement, considering not only the supervisor's ratings but also the breadth of contexts encountered versus those expected and paying particular attention to the narrative comments, which provide rich data. When deciding if a resident has achieved a particular EPA, the Committee expects to see improvement over time as well as an overall pattern of consistent competence. Determinations that a resident has achieved EPAs are based on a holistic assessment that integrates ratings and narrative comments rather than being based on seeing that the resident has met a certain quota of EPAs rated as "I didn't need to be there."

How does a Competence Committee decide if I'm on track and should progress?

Competence Committee members use their judgement to assess overall resident competence. To do this, they consider your progress on your EPAs, but that alone does not give the committee a full picture of your competence. They will also consider other available assessments that make up the overall program of assessment (e.g., OSCEs, simulations, in-training examinations, reports).

It is important to emphasize that Competence Committees look at broad patterns of performance, which includes assessments of your performance of EPAs as well as other key data associated with all of the CanMEDS stage-specific competencies, and other assessments that your specific program may require.

When there is evidence showing that you have, on balance, demonstrated achievement of all competencies for a particular stage, then the Competence Committee will recommend promotion. When gaps are detected, the Committee will recommend that the RPC or its delegate take additional steps to support you.

How and when will I be informed of the status decision?

The Competence Committee chair reports the recommended status of each resident to the RPC, which then ratifies the recommendations and creates any related action plans (monitor learner, promote learner, modify learning plan, etc.). As soon as possible after the committee makes its decision and the decision is ratified by the RPC, the PD or an appropriate delegate will inform you of the outcome (in writing, in person or otherwise). Changes in status should also be visible in your Entrada dashboard according to the schedule and process of your program.

Committee discussions are confidential. They are shared only on a professional need-to-know basis — a principle equivalent to patient confidentiality in clinical medicine. Some committee discussions must be disclosed to provide focused support and guidance for residents (as with the principle of patient handover). When applicable, changes to your learning plan, assessments or rotation schedule are developed with you and implemented as soon as feasible.

Programs establish their own processes and timelines for these check-ins, so be sure to ask for clarification if this is unclear to you. Committee work must be timely to ensure fairness and appropriate sequencing of training experiences.

How are Competence Committee decisions recorded?

The Competence Committee recommendations about your progress (also known as status recommendations) are recorded in your portfolio and are communicated to the RPC for ratification. Once ratified by the RPC, the status decision is communicated to you and recorded in the committee's archives.

Can I appeal a status decision?

Every school has an appeal mechanism in place for the situation where a resident does not agree with the decision of the Competence Committee. This appeal process conforms to [PGME guidelines](#), and decisions at the university are final.

To learn more about Competence Committees, [please see the CBD Directory](#) or the [Competence Committees information page](#) on the Royal College website.