

# Methodology for development of a national clinical assessment form for radiation therapy

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## Background

Since 2004, a group of representatives from the universities providing entry level radiation therapy (RT) programmes have met biannually to co-ordinate national clinical practice placements. At these meetings the RT Lecturers' Group established that there were challenges in clinical assessment posed by the variety of assessment forms in use. A large degree of commonality across the universities in the clinical assessment forms was identified. It was felt that sufficient commonality existed to develop a nationally standardised assessment form.

This paper describes the rationale behind the development of the form and the methodological approach used in its design. This project has been funded by the Department of Health and Ageing, Radiation Oncology Division. The universities involved in the project included Newcastle University, RMIT University, Queensland University of Technology, Monash University, University of Sydney and University of South Australia. The project was lead by University of South Australia.

## Methodology

### Identification of need

RT programmes are delivered at six Australian universities in four states, with students participating in clinical placement in six states. Each university has different academic and assessment requirements for clinical practice. Students in each programme undertake clinical placements both locally and interstate. Thus, at any one time, a clinical centre may have students from a number of different universities which currently use different assessment forms for evaluation of student performance. This presents challenges in the uniformity of assessment and evaluation of student performance.

### Objectives of the project

- To create a common clinical placement assessment form applicable for students from any of the six universities.
- To adapt the assessment domains from the AIR's *Competency Based Standards (CBS) for the Accredited Practitioner* (AIR 2005) to fit the scope of practice of a radiation therapy student as a basis for the assessment form.
- To remove confusion created by the current diverse range of assessment forms and ease the burden of placements on providers.
- To increase efficiencies in the student assessment process.
- To encourage the movement of radiation therapy students to multiple locations for clinical placement.

The profession has been advised of this project at its commencement and updated at key stages during the development of the assessment form through the AIR PAEB, and clinical educators.

### Application for support from Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing

A submission on behalf of the six Australian universities seeking funding for the development of a national assessment form was made to the Radiation Oncology Division of the Department of

Health and Ageing. The objectives of the project were supported and the submission was successful.

### Appointment of an independent contractor to conduct the project

To avoid bias, an independent contractor was sought to facilitate the project. Requirements for the contractor were a health education background and experience in research. The scope of the project for the contractor was: the development, validation and evaluation of the assessment form and the construction of a user guide. The independent contractor appointed for this project was the Centre for Allied Health Evidence (CAHE) from University of South Australia.

### Development of the assessment form – first draft

Similar projects in other health professions' training (e.g. occupational therapy) were reviewed to inform the development of process around designing the form.

The CAHE collated and reviewed all assessment forms currently in use and identified areas of commonality across the forms.

Recommendations for assessment criteria were developed. These were aligned to the AIR's *Competency Based Standards for the Accredited Practitioner* (AIR 2005).

The first draft of the form and user guide was presented to representatives of the universities. Further refinement and review was completed prior to presentation at a professional workshop at the national conference in Melbourne.

### Professional workshop – Australian Scientific Meeting of Medical Imaging and Radiation Therapy (ASMMIRT) 2008

A workshop discussion involving 33 clinical educators and other interested stakeholders was held during the ASMMIRT conference in April 2008. Conference attendees were invited to attend the workshop via the conference website and participation was open to any interested stakeholder in radiation therapy clinical assessment. Workshop participants took part in two rounds of small group discussion facilitated by a member of the RT Universities Clinical Coordinators Group. Workshop participants suggested some minor changes to wording in the assessment form and the user guide, and consensus was reached as to the core criteria for assessment.

At the end of the workshop participants were invited to participate in the next stage of the development process and provided their contact details if interested.

### Development of the assessment form – second draft

A nominated group of 36 interested stakeholders representing each state participated in further evaluation of the assessment form utilising a re-iterative Delphi technique. This group was nominated by the RT University Clinical Coordinators Group and included interested workshop participants, past and current clinical educators and academics from radiation therapy, nuclear medicine and radiography.

Nominees were contacted via email and asked to provide consent to participate by signing a consent form. They were

emailed an updated draft of the assessment form, and user guide along with a questionnaire designed to further refine the form.

The workshop and Delphi group participants provided valuable feedback in refining the assessment form with a second draft completed by July 2008. Ethics approval for both the workshop and Delphi survey process was granted by the University of South Australia's Human Research Ethics Committee.

#### **Pilot testing of assessment form**

Four clinical sites in Western Australia and Tasmania were selected to participate in pilot testing of the assessment form and user guide. These sites were chosen because they accept students from multiple universities and as such were able to address and test the utility of the form in practice for several cohorts of students. The pilot testing of the form was approved by the University of South Australia's Human Research Ethics Committee.

The pilot involved assessment of each student on placement, using both the university-specific assessment form, and the newly developed assessment form. A questionnaire developed by the CAHE was completed by volunteer clinical supervisors involved in this process to gather additional feedback on the form when applied to practical assessment scenarios.

#### **Development of the assessment form – final draft**

As a result of the pilot testing of the form there were some modifications to the form. Final statements relating to copyright and funding for the collaborative project by Department of Health and Ageing were also added.

#### **Development of support materials and training package**

In order to support the implementation of the new assessment form, a training package has been developed in CD Rom format and this will be distributed to all Australian

radiation therapy departments. The training package has AIR CPD appellation assigned to it in order to allow radiation therapists who complete the training to claim points for CPD.

In addition, each state will facilitate face-to-face sessions at key locations in the use of the new assessment form prior to implementation. It is envisaged that the new form will be implemented nationally by July 2009.

#### **Communication and rollout of national clinical assessment form and user guide**

Formal notification to the AIR through the PAEB that the project is nearing completion and implementation has occurred. The PAEB have been provided with a project report, electronic copies of the assessment form and user guide and will soon receive a copy of the CD Rom training package. An advertisement about the new assessment form and user guide will also appear in this issue of *Spectrum*.

#### **Conclusion**

The project to develop a nationally standardised clinical assessment form and user guide for all Australian radiation therapy students has involved analysis and synthesis of five different assessment forms currently in use across six universities. Validation, feedback and pilot testing involving a large group of relevant stakeholders was conducted to refine the form and user guide. It is envisaged that the implementation and use of such an assessment tool will have a significant impact on the training and assessment workload of staff in the clinical centres and reduce confusion related to the multitude of assessment tools that are currently in use.

This project would not have been possible without collaboration between universities, clinical educators and members of the profession.

## **www.cancerlearning.gov.au**

Cancer Learning is an online professional development site designed specifically for health professionals working in cancer care. The site allows professionals to find existing evidence-based resources and learning activities, build educational programs and plan their professional development pathway to further their careers and improve the patient experience.

A major aim of Cancer Learning is to consolidate the rapidly growing variety of evidence-based learning activities, resources and information available about:

- Optimising multidisciplinary care
- Improving coordination of care
- Improving supportive care, including psychosocial support
- Fundamentals of oncology
- Latest treatments and evidence-based medicine.

All listed resources pass through a transparent evaluation process, available on the site. Examples of resources on the website include a multidisciplinary toolkit, a psychosocial support tutorial, a referral toolkit for GPs and specialists and a guide to clinical practice improvement. Information and resources can also be found about specific areas of cancer care including indigenous, CALD, paediatric and adolescent and young adult.

## **CANCER LEARNING**

A variety of sample professional pathways are available in the PLAN section of the website, including one for Radiation Therapists at: [http://www.cancerlearning.gov.au/plan/radiation\\_therapy\\_pathway.php](http://www.cancerlearning.gov.au/plan/radiation_therapy_pathway.php)

The Cancer Learning project has been funded by Cancer Australia and developed by the Office of Postgraduate Medical Education (OPME), a Faculty of Medicine based team at the University of Sydney; leading a consortium comprising the Clinical Oncological Society of Australia, the National Breast and Ovarian Cancer Centre, the Cancer Council Australia and the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners.

**For more information, email [info@cancerlearning.gov.au](mailto:info@cancerlearning.gov.au) or contact [Gemma Connolly gemmac@med.usyd.edu.au](mailto:Gemma.Connolly.gemmac@med.usyd.edu.au)**

### **Do you have a topic for a word find or crossword puzzle?**

Would you like to have a go at creating some questions?

If you would like to assist in the creation of wordfinds for future issues of *Spectrum*, contact Lori McLeod [cpd@air.asn.au](mailto:cpd@air.asn.au) for information on how to become involved.

Who knows, you might learn something!