

A Competency Framework for Rheumatology Nurses: **Specialism Specific Practitioner**

This document should be used in conjunction with the first edition of the RCN's *Competency Framework for Rheumatology Nurses* (2020) as guidance, this includes advice on the assessment process and on providing evidence. The competency framework is available at: www.rcn.org.uk/professional-development/publications/pub-009004

Level of competency attainment guidance	Level
Cannot perform/demonstrate this activity satisfactorily or participate in the clinical environment	1
Can perform/demonstrate this activity but not without constant supervision and assistance	2
Can perform/demonstrate this activity with some supervision or assistance - and in clinical settings discussing cases as needed	3
Can perform without supervision or assistance demonstrating more than acceptable speed and quality showing initiative and adaptability to special problem situations - and in clinical settings discussing only difficult cases	4
Can perform without supervision or assistance demonstrating more than acceptable speed and quality showing initiative and adaptability to special problem situations and can lead others in undertaking this activity - and in clinical settings bringing pertinent cases to MDT meetings or appropriate clinician as required	5

Adapted from Benner (1984).

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Competency 1: Specialism knowledge				
Performance criteria	Evidence	Level achieved	Date	Assessor/self-assessed
Knowledge and understanding				
Understands aetiology biology and pathophysiology of MSK and rheumatological conditions, co-morbidities, and differential diagnoses, including complex autoimmune connective tissue diseases, vasculitis, rare metabolic bone disease or inherited connective tissue disease and treatment pathways.				
Understands the main classifications of drug therapy including analgesia, non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), disease modifying anti-rheumatic drugs (DMARDs), immune modulatory drugs and corticosteroids.				
Understands the impact of combination therapies, increases in dosage and the risks related to immunosuppression (especially in CYP).				
Understands treatment pathways including Treat to Target, self-management strategies, and national standards.				
Understands the risk factors for prolonged corticosteroid use and impact upon children and young people's growth, weight, skin and pubertal development.				
Understands the difference between paediatric and adult onset disease and what happens to their disease through a lifetime course.				
Understands the importance of screening and regular review for evidence of uveitis in children.				
Understands red flags indicating uveitis in a young child.				

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Understands bone health, including the importance of diet, vitamin D, micronutrients, exercise and associated risk factors and their importance within the rheumatology context including child development (where appropriate).				
Understands falls and fracture risk in rheumatology patients and can explain these to patients and carers.				
Understands normal, osteopenia and osteoporosis dual energy-ray absorptiometry (DXA) results, and resulting treatment options.				
Understanding of the role of the multidisciplinary team (MDT).				
Skills and behaviours	Evidence	Level achieved	Date	Assessor/self-assessed
Provides person-centred care in relation to the specific health care needs of patients with rheumatological conditions.				
Able to describe multifactorial issues in the development of rheumatological conditions and can explain these to patients and carers.				
Applies specialist knowledge to evaluate new clinical ideas that are emerging in rheumatology.				
Discusses the principles of rheumatology nursing practice and explains how care is organised throughout the patient journey to colleagues and people with rheumatological conditions and their carers.				
Provides dietary advice to those receiving corticosteroid therapies, including avoidance of foods contributing to weight gain, and how to avoid poor bone health.				

Competency 2: Clinical assessment planning implementation and evaluation				
Performance criteria	Evidence	Level achieved	Date	Assessor/self-assessed
Knowledge and understanding				
Understands the importance of carrying out disease activity scoring and other outcome measures relevant to patient or condition.				
Understands normal body movements and factors which might alter these; including child development, delayed diagnosis and access to care.				
Understands the importance of correctly identifying and managing pain and develops an understanding of pharmacological and non-pharmacological approaches.				
Understands the reasons for appropriate requesting of investigations such as blood tests, radiological investigations, x-rays, US, CT, and MRI.				
Accurately interprets a range of investigations using the results to derive a management plan.				
Understands the importance of potentially serious pathology (red flags) and reports to appropriate clinician.				
Understands infection prevention procedures and is specifically aware of infection risks for rheumatology patients, especially those on immune modulating therapies.				
Understanding the potential psychological and social implications of living with a rheumatological conditions.				
Holds IR(ME)R certification and training in order to carry out baseline screening for patients starting drug therapy according to relevant national guidelines.				
Understands the Health and Safety at Work Act, public health issues, services policies, procedures and protocols, local cytotoxic policy for administration of methotrexate and cyclophosphamide – including risk factors to mothers giving treatment to their children while pregnant.				

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Knowledge of the non-MSK manifestations of rheumatological pathologies.				
Knowledge of the potential psychological and social implications of living with a rheumatological condition.				
Understands falls risk implications and the importance of assessment.				
Skills and behaviours	Evidence	Level achieved	Date	Assessor/self-assessed
Can interpret infection risks and implications for patient treatment and escalates to appropriate clinician.				
Carries out physical MSK objective examination (where appropriate) interpreting and acting on findings.				
Requests investigations appropriately and recognises unexpected findings and reports these appropriately.				
Ability to carry out venepuncture or cannulation if appropriate.				
Identifies and supports patients to manage acute and chronic pain, referring to appropriate services.				
Undertakes accurate disease activity scoring, incorporating knowledge of wider factors, including co-morbidities influencing this.				
Documenting and monitoring progress towards agreed targets and explaining these to patients and carers.				
Applies knowledge of normal body mechanics and Includes additional physical examination to further understand the impact of the patient's diagnosis.				

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Consistently initiates shared decision making in partnership with the patient based on experience and expertise to achieve the best outcome. Making Every Contact Count.				
Develops clinical assessment skills of other systems and understanding of why these are required.				
Able to define red flags and act on findings.				
Support progression through age appropriate care from paediatric to adult care.				
Develops effective use of selective questioning and gauging responses (consultation skills) to achieve accurate assessment.				
Uses age appropriate language and includes parent/ carer, where appropriate.				
Proactively identifies adult and child safeguarding issues and reports appropriately.				
Uses age appropriate scoring and measurement tools relevant to disease monitoring.				
Initiates falls and fracture risk assessment referral.				

Competency 3: Disease management				
Performance criteria	Evidence	Level achieved	Date	Assessor/self-assessed
Knowledge and understanding				
Knowledge of the implications of long-term conditions, their ongoing management and effects on patients and families.				
Understands public health issues regarding the potential for the misuse of drugs.				
Understands the of the mode of action and aims of use of therapies, screening, side effects, monitoring requirements, pre-treatment safety checks and reporting side effects complying with local policy.				
Knowledge of side effects of treatment and complies with local policy on reporting side effects.				
Understands the implications of the use of patient group directions (PGDs) and non-medical prescribing.				
Knowledge of the use of over the counter (OTC) medication and non-pharmacological interventions including complementary therapy and supplements.				
Knowledge and understanding of other therapies and services that may be suitable.				
Skills and behaviours	Evidence	Level achieved	Date	Assessor/self-assessed
Undertakes risk assessment and capacity of patient and carers.				
Educates staff about risk assessment and capacity of patient and carers.				

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Effectively counsels patients and carers, and offers supporting information in relevant format.				
Able to support patient and family to select most appropriate medication and administration of medication and provides support for ongoing self-management and assesses treatment concordance.				
Advises patients and carers on the appropriate use of OTC medications and supplements and the potential interactions with prescribed medications.				
Understands the use of 'off licence' prescribing. Counsels and supports patient and carer in safe administration of medication at home with knowledge of risk factors including use of off licence treatments.				
Competent to administer specialist prescribed treatments.				
Recognises and implements strategies to help with needle phobia, eg, distraction techniques, rewards.				
Safely administers Entonox for procedures as per local policies.				
Undertakes safe use of PGDs within agreed local protocols. Evaluates reported side effects of treatments and actively manages these, seeking advice where needed.				
Co-ordinates multidisciplinary patient management and follow up.				
Identifies patients at risk or in need of advice or referral regarding misuse of drugs or over prescription.				
Identifies and refers patients to other therapies and services working collaboratively to enhance service delivery and patient outcomes.				

Competency 4: Communication				
Performance criteria	Evidence	Level achieved	Date	Assessor/self-assessed
Knowledge and understanding				
Has the knowledge to access specific tools to aid rheumatological assessment.				
Understands factors affecting self-management and evidence-based approaches to patient education.				
Understands national guidance documents within the scope of rheumatology to support safe practice.				
Skills and behaviours	Evidence	Level achieved	Date	Assessor/self-assessed
Provides accurate information to patients, carers and families when starting treatment and importance of safe medication administration, in a developmentally appropriate manner.				
Shows capability in communicating with patients about treatments and can tailor specific approaches eg, goal setting and motivational interviewing.				
Describes approaches to diagnosis, treatments and ongoing monitoring to patients and their carers.				
Understands specific risk factors relating to rheumatology and Making Every Contact Count.				
Counsels individuals commencing drug treatments and recognise where behaviours are deviating from agreed care plan.				
Provides written contact information regarding rheumatology and home care delivery services and out of hours procedures and access.				

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Acts to collaborate and promote drug persistence and adherence.				
Ensures adequate provision of medication liaising with prescribers as needed.				
Able to problem solve and escalate where issues arise. Identifies specific potential risk factors.				
Ability to signpost for health promotional concerns, Making Every Contact Count.				
Contributes to the development and evaluation of specialist local patient information resources and seeks patient feedback.				
Ensures clear communication routes are used by patients having home care delivery.				
Promotes e-health approaches, telemedicine, care planning and documentation in line with local policies and national guidelines.				
Demonstrates specific skills to undertake telephone consultations.				
Contributes to evidence-based patient education sessions co-ordinating with the MDT for delivery, taking into account the individual needs of patients and carers.				
Supports the delivery of care across a clinical network. Communicates and shares relevant information with other agencies interacting with the child, young person or young adult, including schools and colleges.				

Competency 5: Service delivery				
Performance criteria	Evidence	Level achieved	Date	Assessor/self-assessed
Knowledge and understanding				
Is aware of pathways used in rheumatology and follows them for patient care.				
Is aware of patient feedback mechanisms.				
Understands the importance of planned, smooth transfer of care between primary, community and secondary care settings.				
Has knowledge of skills and expertise of others and appropriate referral pathways.				
Utilises patient feedback, compliments and complaints to advance service development and improvement.				
Skills and behaviours	Evidence	Level achieved	Date	Assessor/self-assessed
Ability to manage clinical caseload safely, effectively and efficiently demonstrating excellent time keeping skills.				
Able to carry out clinical annual review using local protocol.				
Ensures systems are in place to support patients and carers where necessary.				

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<p>Supports team members to ensure core service delivery. Collects and reports service user feedback.</p>				
<p>Ensures robust data collection and adherence to commissioning requirements for high cost drugs.</p>				
<p>Provides teaching to young people at an age appropriate level to encourage self-administration and self-management.</p>				
<p>Management of transitional care plans and engaging with young people and carers early in preparation for transfer to adult rheumatology teams.</p>				
<p>Regular liaison with follow on care services, ensuring ongoing support of young person and carer after transfer.</p>				

Competency 6: Governance and accountability				
Performance criteria	Evidence	Level achieved	Date	Assessor/self-assessed
Knowledge and understanding				
Understands the principles of duty of care and the importance of reporting near misses and errors.				
Understands research approaches and their relevance to practice.				
Undertaken quality improvement module.				
Skills and behaviours	Evidence	Level achieved	Date	Assessor/self-assessed
Recognises specific gaps and issues and problem solves or escalates issues related to the principle of duty of care.				
Is able to use DATIX or equivalent system for reporting near misses and/or errors.				
Takes part in audits and puts recommendations into practice.				
Able to identify and develop learning opportunities for others based on their needs.				
Participates in quality improvement processes and audit and can present data to colleagues.				

Competency 7: Leadership and development				
Performance criteria	Evidence	Level achieved	Date	Assessor/self-assessed
Knowledge and understanding				
Knows the vision, values, principles and policies of the organisation and how to access them.				
Accesses a foundation level leadership training.				
Understands the nature of projects and deadlines and how these can impact the service.				
Skills and behaviours	Evidence	Level achieved	Date	Assessor/self-assessed
Promotes organisational goals. Understands service and organisation's policies and practices.				
Able to undertake literature search to access current evidence for clinical practice. and take part in research.				
Discusses strategies which might be used to facilitate their own and others learning in practice.				
Regularly attends professional forums, local teaching, regional network updates on treatments and maintains own knowledge and competence to meet professional standards, CPD and revalidation requirements.				
Actively participates in meetings.				
Can mentor staff and appraise as appropriate.				
Can lead small groups in project work and to meet deadlines.				

Area identified for development	Review date	Outcome

I confirm that the level of competence described above evidences my current skills and capability within the competence framework.

Signed

Date

Signed

Designation

Date