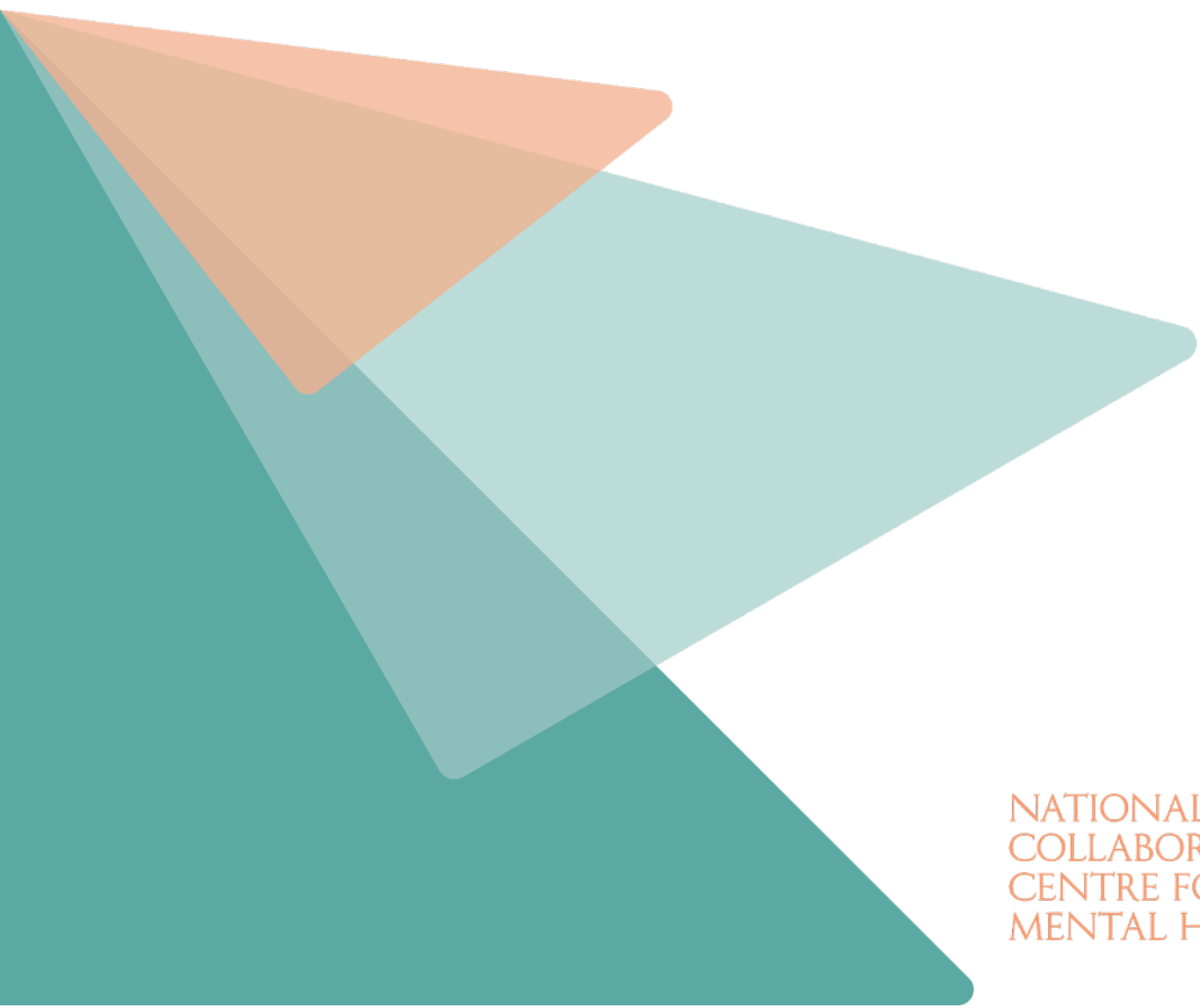


The Competence Framework for Physician Associates in Mental Health

Curriculum



NATIONAL
COLLABORATING
CENTRE FOR
MENTAL HEALTH

Authorship statement

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1. About the curriculum and the mental health physician associate role

1.1. Relationship between the curriculum and the competence framework

Competences outlined in this document are detailed in The Competence Framework for Physician Associates in Mental Health (MH PAs), available at:

www.rcpsych.ac.uk/improving-care/physician-associates

The curriculum is closely mapped to the competence framework, which provides a detailed account of the knowledge and skills associated with each module.

1.2. Relationship between initial training, relevant mental health experience and the mental health curriculum

All MH PAs will have completed a 2-year generic university Level 7 course in Physician Associate Studies, which should have included some of the competences set out in this curriculum. Some PAs working in mental health settings may also have worked in other clinical fields and gained competences from their experience. There will be a need to undertake a review of this, to inform planning for additional training needs aimed at extending their knowledge and skills.

The MH PA curriculum should be used to inform the training requirements for PAs working in mental health settings.

1.3. Updating the curriculum

Over time, there will be a need to revise the curriculum as the role of the MH PA becomes better defined and differentiated. For example, with regulation, PAs are likely to gain prescribing rights. This would necessitate some revision of the competence framework and the curriculum (which is currently restricted to medication management). It is therefore recommended that the curriculum is updated 2 years after initial publication or after General Medical Council regulation.

Terminology

The term 'patient' has been used throughout to denote the person in receipt of services. However, a good-quality service will often extend contact to include both the patient and their partner or other significant family members, and when this is the case the term 'service user' is used.

1.4. Outline structure of the curriculum

The curriculum is laid out in six modules, each containing multiple units. The first three modules function as a basic ‘primer’, setting out knowledge and skills needed to work with patients presenting with mental health difficulties; the next three cover more specific and specialist areas of competence.

The [first module](#) sets out areas of knowledge relevant to MH PAs, and the [second](#) identifies professional and legal issues pertinent to their work. The [third module](#) focuses on relational skills, including the capacity to engage and communicate effectively with patients and form a collaborative relationship with them.

The [fourth module](#) details diagnostic and assessment skills, the [fifth](#) contains interventions associated with the role (including a [sub-module](#) on the ways that PAs can intervene to address the interface between mental and physical health), and the [sixth](#) focuses on team working skills.

2. Overarching aims and objectives

2.1. Aims

To convey a practical understanding of the attitudes, knowledge and skills that underpin the MH PA role.

To enable MH PAs to offer effective and values-driven support to patients, by outlining:

- background knowledge relevant to their work, including knowledge about mental and physical health
- knowledge of the professional and legal context within which services are offered, and the ability to operate in this context
- skills that support engagement with patients
- assessment and intervention skills.

2.2. Objectives

At the end of a training that encompasses the curriculum, MH PAs will be able to:

- demonstrate an understanding of the values and principles that underpin the MH PA role
- demonstrate knowledge of professional practice and the ways in which application of this knowledge assures practice that is ethically sound
- demonstrate effective communication skills with people with whom they are engaged
- demonstrate effective communication skills with members of teams with whom they work and other relevant agencies
- demonstrate a capacity to engage and support patients with interventions relevant to their mental and physical health conditions and difficulties
- manage challenges arising in the implementation of the assessment and intervention process
- demonstrate self-direction, self-care and reflexivity in tackling and solving problems that may arise when working as a MH PA
- demonstrate an ability to adapt assessments and interventions to the needs of each individual patient, and assure equitable access for patients from diverse cultures and with different values.

3. Learning and teaching strategy

Completion of the 2-year university Level 7 course in Physician Associate Studies will provide some of the knowledge and skills relevant to working in mental health, and in the interface between physical and mental health. The curriculum will help identify where this prior training needs to be extended, and which modules and units need to be addressed to assure competent practice.

The specific learning and teaching strategy will be determined by the training context. These skills can be gained through formal inceptorship programmes, PA-specific continuing professional development (CPD) sessions, other professional CPD sessions, formal courses or study, through clinical supervision, or as part of regular supervised work. An overarching teaching and training strategy would usually link learning within teaching with supervised practice, and include:

1. an emphasis on experiential and skills-based training
2. use of clinical vignettes and scenario-based learning
3. self-directed study to include general and specific reading, plus reference to online resources
4. opportunities to apply learning with patients, and for this work to be subject to review and development through supervision of clinical practice
5. learning from patients and multidisciplinary working.

3.1. Assessment of competence/training evaluation

Specific details of formative and summative assessments of learning and clinical competence will depend on the context in which learning takes place.

However, it is assumed that supervision of PAs will always include direct observation of their practice, MH PAs, like all other PAs are expected to complete a portfolio documenting CPD and workplace-based assessments as well as obtaining and reflecting on incidents, complaints and compliments, and anonymised peer assessments.

Local arrangements will be in place to manage any areas of significant concern, which can be escalated through professional processes under the General Medical Council.

Module 1: Knowledge

UNIT 1.1 Knowledge and understanding of mental health problems across the lifespan

Aims: To develop knowledge of the ways in which mental health difficulties manifest, and the factors that can promote or protect against these difficulties

Competences covered in this unit:

Ability to draw on knowledge of the influence of normal lifespan development and developmental psychopathology on the ways in which mental health difficulties present

Ability to draw on knowledge of the social, psychological, family and biological factors associated with an increased risk of developing and maintaining mental health problems

Ability to draw on knowledge of factors that promote wellbeing and emotional resilience

Ability to draw on knowledge of the ways in which mental health problems can impact on functioning and individual development

Ability to draw on knowledge of the diagnostic criteria for the range of mental health and neurodevelopmental conditions usually seen in clinical services and the ways these emerge and present across the lifespan

Ability to draw on knowledge of the range and impact of neurodegenerative conditions often but not exclusively seen in older adults in clinical services

UNIT 1.2 Knowledge of biopsychosocial models of mental health

Aims: To develop knowledge of the biopsychosocial model and its application

Competences covered in this unit:

Ability to draw on knowledge of the biopsychosocial model

Ability to draw on knowledge of the application of the biopsychosocial model in the assessment and management of mental health difficulties

UNIT 1.3 Knowledge of mental health interventions

Aims: To develop knowledge of the range of interventions in mental health

Competences covered in this unit:

Ability to draw on knowledge of the range of pharmacological, psychological and psychosocial interventions available to people experiencing mental health difficulties

Ability to draw on knowledge of national guidance that include recommendations on the role of different interventions and of relevant evidence that indicates the basis for the use of particular interventions

Ability to draw on knowledge of specialist interventions and the specific circumstances for which these are indicated

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UNIT 1.4 Knowledge of pharmacology in mental and physical health

Aims: To develop knowledge of pharmacology in mental and physical health

Competences covered in this unit:

Ability to draw on knowledge of mental and physical health disorders where medication potentially forms part of the intervention, and which commonly present in the service

Ability to draw on knowledge of national guidance that include recommendations regarding the role of medication (e.g. NICE or SIGN¹ guidelines)

Ability to draw on knowledge of medications for which specific investigations need to be carried out

Ability to recognise significant side effects from medication and to take appropriate action

Ability to draw on knowledge of the ways in which medication can be combined with psychological or other interventions in order to maximise its likely effectiveness

¹ National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, and Scottish Intercollegiate Guidelines Network.
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Module 2: Professional and legal issues

UNIT 2.1 Knowledge of legal frameworks

Aims: To develop knowledge of relevant legal frameworks and their application in practice

Competences covered in this unit:

Ability to draw on knowledge of the relevant legislation and policies that apply to the settings in which interventions take place, and which apply to mental health, capacity and informed consent, data protection and equalities

UNIT 2.2 Knowledge of, and ability to operate within, professional and ethical guidelines

Aims: To develop knowledge of relevant professional and ethical guidelines and their application in practice

Competences covered in this unit:

Ability to draw on knowledge of local and national guidance on ethical and professional issues, along with relevant legislation and interpret and apply these to clinical and professional working

Ability to recognise the boundaries of their own competence

Ability to identify and minimise the potential for harm

Ability to gain informed consent from service users

Ability to manage confidentiality

Ability to maintain appropriate standards of conduct and competence

Ability to maintain appropriate documentation

Ability appropriately to delegate tasks

Ability to advocate for service users

UNIT 2.3 Knowledge of, and ability to work with, issues of confidentiality, consent and capacity

Aims: To develop knowledge of issues of confidentiality, consent and capacity and their application in practice

Competences covered in this unit:

Ability to draw on knowledge of policies and legislation, and of legal definitions of consent to an intervention

Ability to draw on knowledge of capacity

Ability to draw on knowledge of parental rights and responsibilities

Ability to gain informed consent to an intervention

Ability to draw on knowledge of confidentiality

Ability to draw on knowledge of sharing information to maintain safety

Ability to inform all relevant parties about issues of confidentiality and information sharing

Ability to share information appropriately and securely

UNIT 2.4 Ability to work with difference (equality, diversity and inclusion)

Aims: To develop the ability to work with difference and issues of equality, diversity and inclusion

Competences covered in this unit:

Ability to draw on knowledge of the significance for practice of specific beliefs, practices and lifestyles

Ability to draw on knowledge of social and cultural factors that impact on access to services

Ability to communicate respect and valuing of people

Ability to gain an understanding of the experience of specific beliefs, practices and lifestyles

Ability to adapt communication, assessments and interventions to improve their accessibility and effectiveness

Ability to demonstrate awareness of the influence of the PA's own background and lived experience

Ability to identify and to challenge inequality and discrimination

UNIT 2.5 Ability to recognise and respond to concerns about child protection

Aims: To develop the ability to recognise and respond to concerns about child protection

Competences covered in this unit:

Ability to draw on knowledge of policies and legislation

Ability to draw on knowledge of child protection principles

Ability to draw on knowledge of the ways in which neglect and abuse present, and recognise possible signs

Ability to recognise parental behaviours associated with neglect or abuse

Ability to recognise risk factors for and protective factors against neglect or abuse

Ability to respond where a need for child protection has been identified

Ability to raise concerns about child protection and to contribute to the development and implementation of a child protection plan

Ability to seek advice and supervision

UNIT 2.6 Ability to recognise and respond to concerns about safeguarding

Aims: To develop the ability to recognise and respond to concerns about safeguarding

Competences covered in this unit:

Ability to draw on knowledge of type of neglect and abuse that could trigger a safeguarding concern

Ability to identify signs or indicators that could flag the need to initiate safeguarding procedures

Ability to share concerns with relevant members of a multidisciplinary team and participate in generating an action plan to address them

UNIT 2.7 Knowledge of human rights principles

Aims: To develop knowledge about human right principles and their application in practice

Competences covered in this unit:

Ability to draw on basic knowledge of the Human Rights Act

Ability to draw on knowledge of key human rights principles and how these should inform decision-making

Ability to draw on knowledge of absolute and non-absolute human rights, and of the rationale for proportionate and justifiable restriction of non-absolute rights

Ability to draw on knowledge that decisions related to the Mental Health Act should be compatible with human rights

UNIT 2.8 Ability to make effective use of supervision

Aims: To develop the capacity to make effective use of supervision

Competences covered in this unit:

Ability to work collaboratively with the supervisor

Capacity for self-appraisal and reflection

Capacity for active learning

Ability to use supervision to reflect on developing personal and professional roles

Ability to reflect on supervision quality

Module 3: Engagement and communication

UNIT 3.1 Communication skills

Aims: To develop and deploy communication skills

Competences covered in this unit:

Ability to draw on knowledge of the value and importance of basic communication skills

Ability to deploy communication and listening skills to help engage patients in a collaborative discussion of their circumstances and immediate needs, and to help them expand on or explore relevant issues

Ability to listen empathically and to convey an understanding of the patient's perspective

Ability to adjust communication skills and strategies to each individual, and to the ways in which an assessment or intervention is progressing

UNIT 3.2 Ability to understand and respond appropriately to high levels of distress, and to de-escalate situations

Aims: To develop a capacity to respond appropriately to high levels of distress

Competences covered in this unit:

Ability to help patients access, differentiate and experience their emotions in a manner which best facilitates adaptive change

Ability to help patients express their emotions while also monitoring their capacity to tolerate this and to deploy strategies that help to manage any difficulties that emerge

Ability to reflect on the expression of behaviours and strong emotions

Ability for the PA to reflect on their own reaction to the emotional/behavioural expression and their influence on the patient's behaviour

UNIT 3.3 Ability to foster and maintain good therapeutic relationships with service users

Aims: To develop a capacity to develop and maintain a positive therapeutic relationship and to recognise and respond to threats to this relationship

Competences covered in this unit:

Ability to draw on knowledge of the concept of the therapeutic relationship

Ability to draw on knowledge of practitioner factors associated with building a positive therapeutic relationship

Ability to draw on knowledge of service-user factors associated with building the relationship

Capacity to develop the therapeutic relationship to support an intervention

Capacity to grasp service users' perspective and 'world view'

Capacity to maintain the therapeutic relationship by recognising and addressing threats to the relationship

UNIT 3.4 Communicating with people with disabilities (cognitive, sensory and neurodevelopmental challenges, including intellectual disability)

Aims: To be able to adapt communication when communicating with people with disabilities

Competences covered in this unit:

Ability to recognise when communication needs to be adapted to meet the needs of people with disabilities

Ability to make use of a range of communication strategies where this is indicated

UNIT 3.5 Ability to work using telemedicine

Aims: To develop a capacity to make appropriate use of telemedicine

Competences covered in this unit:

Ability to draw on knowledge of the benefits and challenges of telemedicine (consultations made over the telephone or digital platforms)

Ability to set up and conduct consultations using digital platforms

UNIT 3.6a Enabling co-production

UNIT 3.6b Enabling shared decision-making

Aims: To develop an understanding of co-production and shared decision-making, and their practical application

Competences covered in these units:

An ability to draw on knowledge of the close relationship between shared decision-making and co-production

Ability to draw on knowledge of the principles of co-production and how these principles are enacted in practice

An ability to draw on knowledge of the opportunities and challenges of co-production in developing collaborative management plans and quality improvement

Ability to draw on knowledge of the principles of shared decision-making (collaboration between practitioners and service users to make decisions about the goals they are working towards and the treatments that will be used), and how these principles are enacted in practice

An ability to balance professional and lived experience

Module 4: Diagnostic assessment and treatment planning

UNIT 4.1 Ability to conduct a comprehensive biopsychosocial assessment

Aims: To develop the capacity to conduct a comprehensive assessment

Competences covered in this unit:

Ability to draw on knowledge of the assessment process

Ability to contribute to a multiprofessional assessment and to identify people and agencies who need to be included in the assessment

Ability to engage the patient and (where relevant) their carer/family in the assessment process

Ability to adapt the assessment to match the developmental and cultural needs of the service users

Ability to assess risk of harm to self and others

Ability to take a full psychiatric history (including problem history, developmental history, medical history, relationship history, neglect/abuse and educational history)

Ability to draw on information obtained from other agencies

UNIT 4.2 Ability to undertake a Mental State Examination

Aims: To develop the capacity to undertake and communicate the findings of a mental state examination

Competences covered in this unit:

Ability to draw on knowledge of the aims and structure of the Mental State Examination (MSE)

Ability to draw on detailed observations of the patient to inform judgements of their mental state

Ability to enquire into specific symptom areas and identify psychopathology

Ability to summarise the findings of a MSE

UNIT 4.3 Assessment of risk and need in relation to suicide/self-harm

Aims: To develop the capacity to undertake a risk assessment in relation to suicide/self-harm

Competences covered in this unit:

Knowledge of the aims of a collaborative risk assessment

Ability to engage the patient in the assessment process

Ability to conduct an assessment that identifies key factors in relation to self-harm and suicidal ideation and intent

Ability to assess cognitive and interpersonal factors associated with self-harm and/or suicide

Ability to develop a risk management plan

UNIT 4.4 Assessment of risk and need in relation to risk of harm to others

Aims: To develop the capacity to undertake a risk assessment in relation to harm to others

Competences covered in this unit:

Ability to engage the patient in an assessment

Ability to draw on multiple sources of information to assess and manage risk of harm to others, in a way that is proportionate, considered, non-reactive and evidence-based

Ability to use clinical judgment to arrive at a risk management plan that represents a balanced appraisal of the likelihood and immediacy of harm to others

UNIT 4.5 Ability to assess capacity

Aims: To develop the ability to undertake an assessment of capacity

Competences covered in this unit:

Ability to draw on knowledge of how capacity is defined

Ability to assess capacity

Ability to identify and take into account factors that make it hard for the patient to understand or receive communication, or for them to make themselves understood (and so 'promote' capacity)

UNIT 4.6 Ability to formulate and identify and deliver a management plan

Aims: To develop the capacity to arrive at an individualised diagnosis and formulation

Competences covered in this unit:

Ability to draw on knowledge of the aims of a formulation

Ability to draw on knowledge of the factors usually included in a formulation

Ability to construct an individualised differential diagnosis and formulation

Ability to implement an intervention plan that accommodates and addresses the issues identified by the assessment and the formulation

Ability to revise a formulation in the light of new information or changing circumstances

UNIT 4.7 Communicating and recording the outcomes from an assessment and formulation

Aims: To develop an ability to communicate the outcomes of an assessment

Competences covered in this unit:

Ability to make use of clinical information systems

Ability to communicate the findings from an assessment verbally and in writing

Ability to adapt the level of detail and complexity in order to ensure that it is legible and relevant to patients

UNIT 4.8 Ability to collaboratively engage all relevant parties with the management plan

Aims: To develop the capacity to explain and implement a management plan

Competences covered in this unit:

Ability to engage patients in a collaborative discussion of management options, informed by the information from assessment, diagnosis and formulation and the patient's aims, preferences and goals

Ability to convey information about management options in a manner that is tailored to the patient's capacities

Ability to convey a realistic sense of the effectiveness and scope of each intervention and any challenges associated with each intervention

UNIT 4.9 Ability to coordinate a programme of care with and across different agencies and/or individuals

Aims: To develop the capacity to work effectively and safely with differing agencies

Competences covered in this unit:

Ability to communicate with a range of relevant professionals within and across multidisciplinary teams

Ability to receive and appraise referrals from other professionals/agencies

Ability to initiate and support cross-agency casework

Ability to ensure that the service users are appropriately involved in multi-agency discussions

Ability to coordinate discharge and identify necessary follow-up and/or monitoring by others

UNIT 4.10 Ability to make use of relevant outcome measures

Aims: To develop the capacity to make use of relevant outcome measures

Competences covered in this unit:

Ability draw on knowledge of commonly used and validated outcome measures

Ability to draw on knowledge of the purpose and application of outcome measures

Ability to select and make use of outcome measures

Module 5: Interventions

UNIT 5.1 Management of mental health problems

Aims: To develop the capacity to develop interventions to help manage mental health problems

Competences covered in this unit:

Ability to draw on knowledge of relational factors contributing to the management of mental health problems

Ability to review and monitor medication

Ability to develop a management plan

Ability to manage psychiatric emergencies

Ability to draw on the biopsychosocial model to develop a management plan for psychiatric conditions

Ability to develop a risk management plan

UNIT 5.2 Management of physical health problems

Aims: To develop the capacity to develop interventions to help manage physical health problems

Competences covered in this unit:

Ability to draw on knowledge of physical health problems

Ability to draw on knowledge of relational factors contributing to the management of physical health problems

Ability to take a history, conduct an examination and initiate appropriate investigations

Ability to perform medication reviews

Ability to communicate findings from examinations, medication reviews and tests, and to discuss management plans, including onward referral

Ability to work confidently with acute and urgent presentations of physical disorders

Ability to draw on knowledge of the treatment of chronic physical conditions and their interrelations with mental health

UNIT 5.3 Health promotion

Aims: To develop the capacity to contribute to health promotion initiatives

Competences covered in this unit:

An ability to draw on knowledge of health promotion interventions that strengthen the capacity of patients to improve their own health

An ability to incorporate health promotion principles into all clinical activities

An ability to draw on knowledge of the principles which underpin practice in health promotion

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An ability to draw on knowledge of effective and ineffective ways of implementing health promotion programmes, and to use this to guide planning and implementation

Ability to contribute to monitoring and evaluating health promotion programmes

UNIT 5.4 Monitoring and managing medication

Aims: To develop the capacity to monitor and manage medication

Competences covered in this unit:

Ability to draw on knowledge of medications commonly used to manage and treat mental and physical health conditions

Ability to draw on knowledge of pharmacology

Ability to monitor medication by performing a basic medication review (including interpretation of laboratory investigations)

Ability to discuss the rationale for medication with patients and carers to create a patient centred care plan

Ability to support adherence to prescribed medication

UNIT 5.5 Management of substance use/misuse and addictive behaviours

Aims: To develop the capacity to contribute to managing addictive behaviours

Competences covered in this unit:

Ability to draw on knowledge of addictions (including substance misuse, gambling, etc.)

Ability to draw on knowledge of potential harms resulting from addictive behaviour

Ability to draw on knowledge of evidence demonstrating the benefit of peer support programmes and to facilitate motivation for change and access to these programmes

Ability to recognise and contribute to the management of overdose and withdrawal

Module 5.a: Managing the interface of mental and physical health

UNIT 5.6 Knowledge of common physical health problems in people with mental health problems and ability to advise/intervene to manage these

Aims: To develop the capacity to contribute to managing patients holistically by attending to the interface between physical and mental health

Competences covered in this unit:

Ability to draw on knowledge of mental health problems and core clinical conditions (as set out by the [Faculty of Physician Associates matrix](#))

Ability to draw on knowledge of strategies to help manage acute and chronic physical disorders commonly presenting in mental health patients

Ability to help patients consider the treatment choices open to them and develop a management plan

Ability to discuss relevant lifestyle changes with patients and carers

UNIT 5.7 Knowledge of a generic model of medically unexplained symptoms (MUS; functional symptoms)

Aims: To be able to draw on knowledge of a generic model of MUS

Competences covered in this unit:

Ability to draw on a coherent, multifactorial model of MUS

Ability to draw on knowledge of factors thought to predispose towards MUS

Ability to draw on knowledge of factors thought to precipitate and perpetuate MUS

UNIT 5.8 Knowledge of generic models of adjustment to physical health conditions

Aims: To be able to draw on knowledge of a generic model of adjustment to physical health conditions

Competences covered in this unit:

Ability to draw on knowledge of predisposing and precipitating factors that influence a patient's capacity to adjust to physical health condition

Ability to draw on knowledge of biological, cognitive and social factors thought to maintain or help patients' regain emotional equilibrium and quality of life

Ability to draw on knowledge of biological, cognitive and social factors thought to maintain emotional disequilibrium and poor quality of life

Ability to draw on knowledge of indicators of poor adjustment to a long-term health condition

UNIT 5.9 Supporting patients' capacity for self-management

Aims: To develop the capacity to help patients manage their illness more effectively

Competences covered in this unit:

Ability to draw on knowledge of psychological theory in explaining how people respond to illness

Ability to recognise and communicate a diagnosis or formulation involving MUS in a sensitive manner

Ability to engage the patient in self-management

Ability to negotiate opportunities to engage in self-management

Ability to help the patient apply self-management strategies

Ability to help the patient maintain change

Module 6: Team working

UNIT 6.1 Ability to contribute to team working

Aims: To develop the capacity to work effectively as part of a team

Competences covered in this unit:

Ability to draw on knowledge of factors associated with a well-functioning team

Ability to actively contribute to meetings on planning, coordinating, maintaining and evaluating a patient's care or care plans

Ability to recognise and act on signs that team working is becoming dysfunctional

Ability to reflect (individually and as part of a team) on the functioning of the team as a whole, and individual practice within it

UNIT 6.2 Understanding and using leadership skills

Aims: To develop the capacity for effective leadership

Competences covered in this unit:

Ability to draw on knowledge of factors associated with effective leadership and how they are represented in a team

UNIT 6.3 Participating in quality improvement and audit

Aims: To develop the capacity to contribute towards effective audit and quality improvement

Competences covered in this unit:

Ability to draw on knowledge of factors associated with effective audit and quality monitoring

Ability to plan and undertake relevant audits

Ability to participate in developing and implementing quality improvement plans

UNIT 6.4 Teaching and training others, and enhancing skills in the team

Aims: To develop the capacity to teach and train others

Competences covered in this unit:

An ability to teach/train in areas in which the PA has received appropriate training

An ability to draw on basic knowledge of principles associated with effective learning, and to apply these principles in practice

An ability to evaluate the success of teaching/training by asking for feedback