

Accreditation in healthcare quality and safety: First standards for graduate programs

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Initial standards for accreditation of graduate programs in the burgeoning professional discipline of healthcare quality and safety

(HQS) are presented in the November/December issue of the *American Journal of Medical Quality*, official journal of the American College of Medical Quality.

The new standards "provided a critical first step toward establishing standards for accrediting HQS programs in North America, and defined the field of HQS," according to the article by members of the HQS Accreditation Standards Committee. The lead author is Willie H. Oglesby, Ph.D., MBA, MSPH, FACHE, of Thomas Jefferson University, Philadelphia.

Development of content and domains for HQS program accreditation

Healthcare quality and safety professionals play a leading role in directing [quality improvement](#) and patient safety programs. Professionals working in HQS have historically come from a range of disciplines, such as nursing, business, health informatics, health administration, and public health. It is increasingly recognized that graduate programs in these diverse fields do not focus on the domains and skills specific to HQS. The new standards define the key content and processes for accreditation of the growing number of graduate programs in HQS.

The development process arose out of initial discussions in 2016 by the Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Management Education (CAHME), along with faculty at Thomas Jefferson University and the University of Alabama at Birmingham. Those discussions led to agreement on a set of organizing principles for an approach to accrediting graduate programs in HQS. Commitment and funding were provided by CAHME and 12 Founding Member institutions. The National Association for Healthcare Quality provided help with logistical

support and engagement with the HQS community.

A committee structure was formed to develop overall criteria for accreditation and specific content domains for the "inextricably linked" fields of healthcare quality and patient safety. A set of competency statements was developed for 13 HQS content domains, including four "foundational" domains: safety and error science, improvement science and quality principles, evidence-based practice, and measurement and process improvement.

The report in *AJMQ* presents a table summarizing each of the 13 content domains, including descriptions, sample competencies, and examples of knowledge, skills, and attitudes relevant to each domain. "While all the domains must be included in the curricula, programs are encouraged to individualize their curricula based on mission, student needs, and other factors," Dr. Oglesby and colleagues write.

The proposed standards were adopted by the CAHME in 2019. Processes and criteria for documentation were established; accreditation periods will generally last seven years for established programs and three years for new programs. Programs at nine of the 12 Founding Member institutions are currently candidates, with the first programs expected to be accredited in 2022–23.

The standards are an important milestone for HQS as a professional discipline, with benefits including support for each accredited program's ongoing commitment to continuous improvement. The authors add, "Accreditation also provides a framework for teaching and training excellence that supports culture change for healthcare systems"—a critical goal in ensuring that quality and safety are valued.

Accredited academic programs will play a key role in guiding the ongoing development of HQS as a professional discipline. Dr. Oglesby

and coauthors conclude: "Since the HQS field is rapidly evolving and as employment and professional engagement matures, the content domains and other elements of [program](#) accreditation will change to reflect current professional practice."

More information: Willie H. Oglesby et al, Accrediting Graduate Programs in Healthcare Quality and Safety, *American Journal of Medical Quality* (2021). [DOI: 10.1097/JMQ.0000000000000021](https://doi.org/10.1097/JMQ.0000000000000021)

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