

Priority Topics and Key Feature FAQ for Residents

What are Priority Topics?

As part of the move to a competency-based model in medical education in Canada, the College of Family Physicians of Canada did a national survey to determine the common clinical presentations that family physicians see in their offices. This informed the “Assessment Objectives for certification in family medicine” (1)

What is a Key Feature?

Simply put – for management of a common clinical presentation, a key feature may be “what is critical to do well”, what is difficult to do well”, or “where do we commonly make mistakes” For workplace-based assessment, we select these aspects as most important to assess. You need to know much more than this to manage any common (or less common) clinical presentation, however, if you can manage what is difficult, or critical, and avoid common errors, and do this habitually, using the 6 Essential Skill dimensions, we can infer competence from this.

Why would I use Priority Topics and Key Features?

Read a few, and we think you will see why! To be sure you reach competence in clinical practice, we assess you “doing” real work, with real patients – with direct observation, and Field Notes. Choosing common presentations, and what is “important/difficult/easy to do wrong” as contexts for assessment makes sense. Your Certification Examination SAMPs are based on the core Priority Topics (not the new Intrapartum and Postpartum, and Rural and Remote Family Medicine Priority Topics).

Where do I find Priority Topics and Key Features?

At this time, we are yet to map the Priority Topics to our new Core Learning Outcomes. How a Priority Topic fits in to a Core Domain is actually quite intuitive to family physicians, and we believe that common sense is the best approach. The best source for visualizing the Priority Topics right now is the CFPC Website: <https://www.cfpc.ca/en/education-professional-development/educational-frameworks-and-reference-guides/assessment-objectives-for-certification-in-fm> This page has handy links to all aspects of the Assessment Objectives. Check out Part III: The Priority Topics and Key Features.

When would I use the Priority Topics?

Consider using them when you make a learning plan on your “Goal Setting ITAR” even if it is just a conversation you're your preceptor. When you identify a Priority Topic that you feel is a “gap” in your learning - share this with your Preceptor at the start of the rotation. Some will know about them, some – you get to introduce them! If you can habitually demonstrate that you meet all the Key Features, then have confidence in your competence. Of course, you need to know these as part of your preparation for your Certification examination – but we think it is more efficient to “study” by “doing” throughout your residency.

How many do I need to cover off to “pass”.

Sorry, no good answer to this, in fact, probably not a useful way of looking at Priority Topics. Being a competent physician is a complex thing, with many interrelated roles and skills. You need lots, and either you learn this in your residency, or perhaps in your first five years of practice where there is no preceptor at your shoulder.

Your part is to demonstrate that many “observers” have observed you in the workplace, and have coached you to improve, and noted what you already do well. Our goal is for you to be a reflective professional practitioner, a lifelong learner, “*who is competent to enter and adapt to the independent practice of comprehensive family medicine anywhere in Canada.*”

1. Crichton T, Schultz K, Lawrence K, Donoff MG, Laughlin T, Brailovsky C, et al. Assessment Objectives for Certification in Family Medicine. College of Family Physicians of Canada; 2020.