



## A Deep Sea Dive into FSBPT’s Continuing Competence Tools

*This article is based on a presentation by Heidi Herbst Paakkonen, Product Manager, FSBPT, and Jeffrey M. Rosa, Managing Director, Federation of State Boards of Physical Therapy, at the 2015 FSBPT Annual Meeting.*

This presentation included a “deep dive” into some of FSBPT’s key continuing competence (CC) tools and services — aPTitude and ProCert. An in-depth technical exploration of these products and services and how they manage and share information and support the Federation’s shared mission of public protection were explored. This session was intended to enhance the knowledge of attendees who have a basic understanding of these tools.

Past presentations focused on high-level overviews of the Federation’s CC program and the tools and services offered. This year, presenters dove into more details on two of the services provided. Specifically, the presentation focused on a deeper explanation of how the ProCert process works and how jurisdictions are utilizing aPTitude for auditing purposes.

Why does FSBPT offer the CC program? The simple answer is that members asked for it.

In 2007, the Delegate Assembly approved a motion to charge the Board of Directors to move forward with the development of a comprehensive CC program in support of public protection to include, but not be limited to:

- CC tools
- A framework for integrating CC tools
- A comprehensive CC certification program
- An appropriate organizational structure

In response, FSBPT developed an approach to a CC system. It engaged various stakeholders, shared information and reported on its efforts and progress along the way, built in systems and tools that are optional, provided assistance to boards in a variety of ways, and promoted the value of CC tools and services in the context of providing public protection. Stakeholders include state boards, licensees, APTA, and vendors offering CC programs.

FSBPT has the resources to build what its 53 member boards cannot do individually. Federation experts are available to present to boards many of the opportunities the Federation can offer to member boards, including the CC system.

The guiding principles for building the system included direction that CC activity choices should

be self-directed by the licensee, that evaluation of an assessment of current competence should be the first step, and that licensees should have a varied menu of activities from which to choose to demonstrate competence, based on the belief that there is no single right way to demonstrate competence.

To make it easier for stakeholders to understand and use the tools, the FSBPT built a user-friendly website, [www.continuingcompetence.org](http://www.continuingcompetence.org).

ProCert is one of the tools available to boards and licensees. It's one of the Federation's most ambitious, fastest-growing and expanding evaluation programs. ProCert evaluates continuing education (CE) and CC activities offered by a variety of vendors against a comprehensive set of standards. The standards, which are the foundation of ProCert, were researched and drafted by FSBPT's Continuing Competence Committee, and are based on evidence and broad stakeholder review and feedback.

Eligible activities include continuing education and conferences. But the criteria are far-reaching and can include live, in-person programs, live webinars, and asynchronous programs such as recordings and text-based programs. While the criteria may change for activity types, the standards apply to all.

Required standards include appropriate language, that they be non-discriminatory, that there be a content analysis performed, and that the instructor / developer be qualified. There are also optional value-added standards.

The activities that meet all required standards are awarded certification. Activities that meet value-added standards are given increased continuing competence units (CCUs).

The approach is different from the traditional approach of awarding value based solely on time. In addition to time, ProCert reflects the demand on the learner, the degree of learner engagement, adherence to evidence-based practice (EBP), and many other factors. For example, a seven-hour CE course using advanced teaching strategies for some of the content, required case presentations by the learners, and a learning assessment could earn eight or even nine CCUs. Activities that comply with fewer standards, or demonstrate less compliance with the standards, receive lower values than the hours may indicate.

ProCert is conducted entirely within the aPTitude online management system. ProCert-certified activities are indicated in aPTitude to assist licensees in making informed and appropriate choices.

Vendors submit proposed activities into ProCert, where it is then auto-assigned to two initial reviewers working independently. The initial reviews are then submitted to a final reviewer who reviews the initial reviews and provides an independent assessment. FSBPT staff reviews the final report for completeness and submits the determination back to the vendor through the system. The vendor has the option of accepting the determination and CCUs awarded or can re-submit for a one-time free reevaluation.

Between August 2012, when ProCert was launched, and August 2015, 120 activity vendors have

achieved 2,412 certified activities. The certification is valid for a year and all certified activities are eligible for recertification.

The reviewers are volunteers selected from a nationwide pool of applicants, including educators, clinicians, and regulators with a range of subject matter expertise and specializations. Reviewers complete 1.5 days of initial hands-on training that includes an advanced review of pre-training materials with emphasis on behavioral objectives and a practice review of five actual activities with discussion.

ProCert currently has 55 active reviewers, with 19 new reviewers trained in 2015. Each reviewer completes two to four reviews per week. At least one training session is planned for 2016 to prepare reviewers to meet the projected demand.

Several strategies are used to ensure consistency and accuracy, including oversight by the Continuing Competence Committee and an established appeal process for activity vendors.

Vendors are supplied with guidance documents giving clear direction on how to meet the standards and submit an activity. Reviewers are supplied with a reference manual. Both can rely on staff support for navigating the system and advice on standards and criteria.

Currently, 23 jurisdictions use ProCert. Reasons for not using it vary, including some jurisdictions having no authority to have courses certified. Others are in the process of evaluating it. For those that use it, ProCert offers a single approval system sought by many activity providers. It evaluates activities against clearly articulated and comprehensive set of requirements and distinguishes between higher and lower quality options. Reviewer preparation focuses on arriving at consistent and accurate determinations. From a licensee's perspective, consistency across states makes sense.

ProCert is based in the online aPTitude system, which was created to share CC information. A number of boards are under the misperception that if they are not one of the 22 jurisdictions that use ProCert, they cannot use aPTitude. But aPTitude also is a system where licensees can track their CC activities and jurisdiction boards can process their CC audits. If licensees upload their activities into aPTitude and their house burns down or the movers lose their paperwork, they can still prove CC if the state board selects them to be audited. aPTitude is entirely free to licensees and state boards.

Jurisdictions can also designate aPTitude as their compliance reporting system without using ProCert. They can run custom Licensee Compliance Reports at any time if a licensee has granted board access to, or the board requires, reporting through aPTitude. It can be a completely paperless audit solution, except for notifications required to be delivered by certified or registered mail.

One of the key stakeholders the Federation considered when aPTitude was being developed was state boards because it wanted aPTitude to be available as an audit service if they had limited resources. Traditional audits are a significant drain on board resources through the need for paper, postage, storage, and staff time to complete.

Georgia was the first jurisdiction to require all its licensees to record their CCs in aPTitude. Licensees also have to upload certificates of completion in aPTitude. When the renewal period ends later this year, Georgia is going to process its CC audit through aPTitude. There are at least two other jurisdictions in the process or that just recently adopted rule language that will require their licensees to upload their activities because they will be processing their CC audits through aPTitude.

By administrative rule, Georgia now requires licensees to maintain a record of completed CC activities in an online system approved by the Board and specified aPTitude as that system. It requires licensees to share information with aPTitude with the Board. All licenses expire on December 31 of odd-numbered years, so this year will be the first with an aPTitude requirement.

FSBPT staff worked collaboratively with Georgia's Board administrator to set up and implement the mandatory system. That included helping to develop informational resources to post on the Board website and Board FAQs. As noted in the FAQs, a failure to load certificates as required will be a violation of the Board rules and may subject a licensee to disciplinary action.

aPTitude was originally developed with the default that licensees did not have to share their activities with the board. They could, instead, use it as their own personal shoebox. What Georgia said was because we're using aPTitude for audits, we're going to require you to share your uploaded activities with the board.

The Georgia Licensee Compliance Report indicates if a licensee did or did not upload completion certificates and whether or not they met mandatory requirements, among many other things.

Federation take-aways from the Georgia experience include the admonishment that establishing a timeline for implementation is key, that collaboration between the board administrator and FSBPT staff is essential, multiple notifications to licensees will be necessary, and that as issues emerge, stakeholders need to be open to strategies to resolve them.

There is nothing in aPTitude that prevents a licensee from applying for renewal. That's a different system and there is no direct integration between aPTitude and a state licensing system. aPTitude gives jurisdictions the ability to run a licensee compliance report and tell renewing licensees they are not permitted to renew until they upload the required documents.

Indiana is considering a rule change to require aPTitude submissions for its licensees. Other states with an eye on the program are Alaska, Arizona, Hawaii, Kentucky, Mississippi, Montana, New Hampshire, New Jersey, Ohio, and Virginia.

There are 21,070 licensees who have registered in aPTitude since its launch in fall of 2010. Another 7,696 were added this year.



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