

Using continuing professional development to get ahead of the game – or at least keep up with

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January 2022

The pandemic has created interesting opportunities and developments in its wash. In order to stay ahead of the game – so to speak – continuing professional development (CPD) can be used effectively and efficiently to make certain industries and workers within those industries are kept up to date and current. One such cohort is pharmacists.

Professional Development is a fundamental need in all industries and businesses. Certified and/or accredited groupings such as accountants, lawyers, teachers, nurses, doctors and engineers are all required to not only undergo professional development – but it also needs to be continuous (CPD) to ensure currency and quality. Some of these professions actually stipulate the number of hours/points required annually to maintain registration and membership.

Professionals Australia provides a clear definition as a starting point - 'Continuing professional development commonly abbreviated to 'CPD' refers to the work-related learning and development that should continue throughout your career. Professionals in some fields must complete mandatory CPD requirements in order to maintain their registration. For others it is entirely discretionary but no less important. CPD is one of the key mechanisms by which high standards of professional practice and the relevance and currency of qualifications and experience are maintained.'

Crawford (2016) highlighted the fact that many organisations/executives demonstrate a certain reluctance to endorse (and of course pay for) professional development – especially when there is no formal requirement. But he argues that CPD (no matter the industry) is essential in that it – 'helps employees continue to not only be competent in their profession, but also excel in it. It should be an ongoing process that continues throughout an individual's career and that actively pursuing professional development ensures that knowledge and skills stay relevant and up to date. It also allows employees to be more aware of changing trends and directions in an industry'. Difficult to argue with when it is spelt out so loudly and clearly.

Micallef and Kayyali (2019) zero in on CPD for pharmacists specifically - 'Continuing Professional Development (CPD) has been mentioned in pharmacy since the early 2000s, both in the United States and Great Britain. CPD is required to ensure practitioners are up-to-date with current drugs and guidelines, and to ensure they are providing optimal patient care. CPD is self-directed, and supports the maintenance of knowledge, skills, and behaviours required for effective personal practice. With increasing new roles for pharmacists and other healthcare professionals, pharmacists need to be trained to ensure service provision and competence, wherever they work. This knowledge needs to be updated regularly to keep up to date with the changing role, with better critical thinking and collaboration. When completing CPD, it is important for the healthcare professional to recognize not just the "how", but also the "why".' This can surely be said of the Australian context – same needs, same context.

Antley (2020) more recently argues - 'the professional world is becoming increasingly competitive and is constantly changing, so professional development and continual learning is more important than ever in being successful and achieving career goals'. This is so true across the board – and is fundamental to the pharmacy industry, specifically.

Pharmacists are essential workers and make an extraordinary contribution to the quality of life for so many people for so many reasons. To this end, continual professional development becomes an absolutely essential element of the pharmacy industry and every effort (and resource) should be actioned to make this possible. With this understanding and commitment in mind there are a number of issues that need close consideration. Being current and expert are essential. Remaining foremost in the minds of patients and customers as highly professional and informed professionals will directly relate to the future and the future of the business of pharmacy.

Benefits of CPD

The benefits of continuing professional development are numerous and in so many ways self-evident, nevertheless a walk through the benefits is timely. A number of sources outline the benefits of CPD and all can be extrapolated and placed in the context of the pharmacy industry and its practitioners.

Chris (2016) proposed ten benefits of CPD including – it sharpens knowledge; it develops skills; it makes employees feel satisfied; it keeps staff up to date; it enhances business reputation; it makes new contacts and develops networks; it bolsters retention; it re-energises ideas; it makes succession planning easier; and it offers benefits to the organisation as a whole. Evidently there are benefits for both employee and employer.

Half (2017) proposed six benefits of professional development – you increase the collective knowledge of your team; you boost employees' job satisfaction; you make your company more appealing; you attract the right kind of candidates; you aid your retention strategy; and you make succession planning easier. Again, the underlying theme is mutual benefit.

Business Advice UK (2019) stress the benefits of professional development in terms of employee gains and suggest CPD provides an employee with the opportunity to – demonstrate an ability to self-improve; keep qualifications up to date; stay on top of the latest developments; network with like-minded professionals; and up-level a CV.

Kaplan Solutions (2021) clearly articulate five key benefits of CPD including – increases retention; builds confidence and credibility; makes succession planning easier; re-energises staff; and improves efficiency.

There appears little doubt – irrespective of the number of benefits articulated by the various thought leaders – that CPD brings about both *improvement* and *change* and clearly makes a solid contribution to the domains of retaining staff, improving expertise, and providing succession options that would not be possible otherwise. At the heart of training and CPD is the notion of ensuring that the pharmacy profession (and the pharmacists associated) maintain the well-earned reputation as a trusted source of health information and support. Fundamental to ensuring profile and reputation is maintaining professional competence. Clinical guidelines and recommendations are changing all of the time and therefore remaining current, and at the same time maintaining adaptability and expertise, are vital. There is enormous comfort that comes with interfacing with a confident and informed professional – no matter what industry or sector.

CPD will manifest itself in improved patient care and health outcomes. Currency is vital to this aspect. Linked closely is the enhancement of the patient/client experience and subsequently improved levels of satisfaction. CPD has enormous potential to improve workflow at all levels and at the same time decrease the likelihood of clinical/administrative errors that inevitably occur – the importance of training in this domain should never be underestimated – even in the case of experienced practitioners. Looking at all things from a fresh perspective is frequently both rewarding and satisfying for practitioners.

Improving and enhancing pharmacy staff communication skills as well as contributing to job satisfaction and job outcomes are also highly enhanced through appropriate training and CPD. With the correct focus and approach, significant dividends are inevitable.

What does CPD for pharmacists look like?

Essential to developing the most effective and immediate mode and model of CPD for pharmacists will require a significant amount of contextualising and 'insider information'. Enter the *Australasian College of Pharmacy (ACP)* and its support Academic Advisory Board. Without question the most logical source of 'what pharmacists need to know' are the pharmacists themselves. Using the various expertise and harvesting tools available – knowing what pharmacists need becomes both doable and highly accurate.

Pharmacy standards are in place and maintained by the *Australian Pharmacy Council (APC)*. Quality assurance of CPD can be (and should be) closely aligned with and guided by accreditation and standards. The role of both accreditation and the maintenance of standards essentially form the basis of CPD content and consideration. The best type of professional development is steeped in currency and immediacy, and is always mindful of changing circumstances, legislation and practice. We have recently experienced a significant set of developments (not to mention pressures) within the pharmacy industry. The role of the pharmacist has been augmented and profiled like never before.

There are numerous modes of delivery available to ensure effective and meaningful learning. Interactivity always plays a major role. Matters of flexibility and relevance are also starring features of any effective approach – especially for busy professionals. Modes of delivery become very important considerations, and the options are considerable. Online delivery, blended delivery and hybrid delivery options can be explored – including webinars, podcasts; articles, face to face workshops and you tube items.

In recent times (courtesy of COVID-19) we have seen a seismic shift in teaching methodology and style – especially at postgraduate level. Flexibility has replaced the 'one size fits all' regime and as a result of this, professional development now is able to embrace a range of pedagogies available. Blended Learning (a mix of online and F2F) becomes an important player in the Sector – and will probably be the dominant mode for some time, at least on the Australian scene.

West (2021) reminds us that Blended Learning (bLearning) has been with us for many years – but focus has been sharpened in more recent times. He believes – 'as blended learning has developed over the last 15 years, distinct models of bL have emerged. By understanding these different models, bL pedagogy and learning design is maximised.' The blended mode also provides the option of part in situ and part in classroom – this can be both effective and cost saving.

CPD for pharmacists needs to embrace these changes to mode and pedagogy and embrace the fact that we now have options at our fingertips that were not there perhaps two or three years ago. The leaps and bounds in technology, for instance, make it possible to provide a

range of activities, by way of CPD, that provide convenient and relatively low cost options. This space needs to be explored and developed.

Conclusion

CPD is a vital aspect of business survival. CPD provides a range of benefits for both the organisation and individual - both tangible and intangible. The pharmacy industry is no exception to this thinking – in fact given the importance of currency and relevancy – CPD becomes an essential component moving forward. Part of the thinking will be the use of new and emerging technologies to provide learning and instruction options.

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