

Revisiting Continuing Professional Development for pharmacist's assistants

Lorraine Osman

What has happened to CPD in the last ten years?

It is some time since we have spoken about continuing professional development (CPD). It is worth reminding ourselves what CPD is, how we should go about it, and what to do with the knowledge that you acquire from it.

CE vs CPD

They might appear at first glance to be the same, but Continuing Education (CE) is very different. For many years, health professionals have relied on CE lectures or structured programmes to keep their knowledge up to date. In general, this can sometimes be a fairly passive way of learning. It doesn't necessarily follow that your practice is in any way changed or enhanced.

Continuing Professional Development, on the other hand, is a lifelong professional commitment to maintain and improve competence and to apply the knowledge gained to one's practice. Throughout your career, CPD is needed so that you can enhance not only your knowledge but your understanding and skills are enriched as well. Obviously, there is an important place for CE but it needs to be taken further and applied in practice.

CPD for pharmacist's assistants

You're probably asking yourself why you need to do CPD. Isn't it enough to be qualified and registered as a pharmacist's assistant? New products come along regularly, new ways of doing things are developed, new ideas about how to manage wellness and illness appear, and even if they didn't, our memories let us down if we don't work regularly with something. Sometimes, we may want to change the sector in which we practice, so we may be entering a new job which challenges our knowledge and skills.

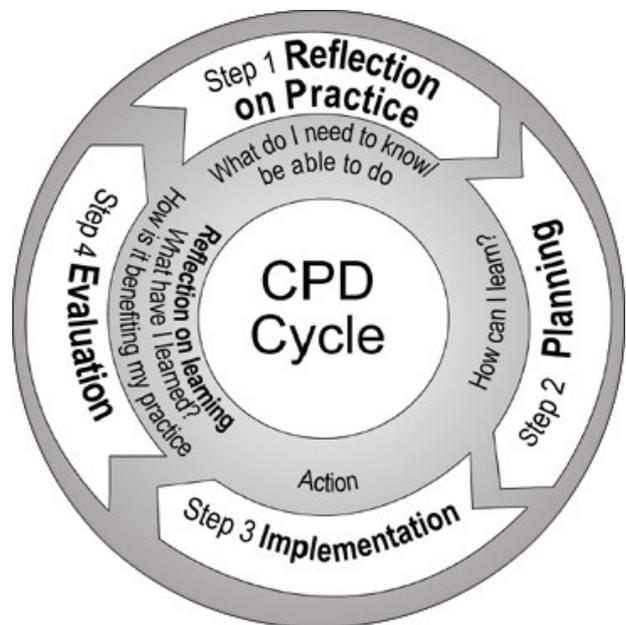
We want to provide the best possible care to our patients, so it's logical that we should make sure that our knowledge and skills are up to date, and that we are competent in our work.

What does Pharmacy Council want?

Pharmacy Council has developed a web-based system for recording CPD activities. It isn't compulsory at this stage, but it is a good idea to become familiar with the way in which Council would like pharmacy professionals to approach CPD.

The CPD cycle

If you go onto the Pharmacy Council website, www.sapc.za.org, you will see that, under the tag "For professionals", there is a section dealing with CPD. On this page, there is a diagram representing the CPD cycle.



CPD cycle

The CPD cycle shows you a logical and easy way to go about your CPD. Just follow the steps!

Step 1 – Reflection on practice

Every now and again we need to take stock of our knowledge and skills. Sometimes, this happens all by itself – a patient

or a colleague asks you a question that you can't answer immediately. You have therefore identified an area of practice that needs attention. At other times, you may feel frustrated because you can't do something as well as you'd like to – another CPD topic identified!

This is one of the things that makes CPD different from CE in pharmacy. YOU are the one who gets to decide what you need to know or do. CE lectures arranged by your employer or your local PSSA branch are definitely useful for improving your knowledge, but they don't always help you with your immediate problem.

Step 2 – Planning

In this stage, you look at your options. How do I get the information? What do I need to do? Some of the possibilities might be to attend a lecture, read a journal or speak to your pharmacist about it. If there is a choice of methods to gain the knowledge, it is up to you to decide which way suits you best.

Step 3 – Implementation

Do you realize that the hard part of CPD has already been done? Having identified what you need to know and how to go about it, you just do it!

Step 4 – Evaluation

CPD is not complete until you reflect on what you have learned. Did I learn what I expected to learn? Did I learn something completely different from what I expected? What difference is it going to make to the way I carry out my daily work? Importantly, ask the question, "How am I going to apply this new knowledge?"

Basis of the portfolio

A portfolio is a record that you keep, with details of both your professional development and your personal experience. The CPD records must either be relevant to your current work, or can be relevant to a new job that you haven't started yet. For example, if you move from community pharmacy into a hospital pharmacy, there will be differences in the responsibilities that you are given.

Remember that the portfolio is only useful if you use it to record each stage of the CPD cycle that was relevant to the particular activity.

The web-based system enables you to compile your own portfolio of learning. If you have access to it, it is a very useful way of recording your CPD activities. If you don't have access to it, it's still easy – keep a file in which you record the answers to the questions that you must ask yourself in each step of the process.

Obviously, you will benefit from doing CPD, but just imagine what a good impression you will make on your employer if you can show him or her proof of your willingness to keep up-to-date with current issues.

Questions to ask yourself

Step 1 – What do I need to know? What do I need to be able to do?

Step 2 – How can I find new information? Who will be able to teach me to do something new?

Step 3 – No questions needed. Just describe what you did to get the information or training.

Step 4 – What have I learnt? How can I apply it in my work?

Where can I find CPD activities?

A new opportunity arises every time you are asked a question that you can't answer! The first person you go to may be your pharmacist, but there are many other opportunities. CPD evenings are often arranged by the PSSA and manufacturers, and if you are able to attend, it will be very useful.

Many people are not in areas in which CPD lectures are given, or perhaps you prefer not to go out in the evening because of family and other responsibilities. In this case, reading articles in journals and distance learning courses have been valuable to many people. Nowadays, CPD is often available as webinars or even YouTube videos. (Go to YouTube and search for "Extemporaneous preparation of a cream". You'll find a video prepared by the University of Wolverhampton in England.)

Use SAPA!

The articles contained in the South African Pharmacist's Assistant are written with you and your scope of practice in mind. Every single article represents a learning opportunity.

If you use the CPD cycle, obviously you didn't identify the need in advance or plan how to deal with it, so you have started in Step 3 of the cycle. The journal arrived and you read it. That's your activity. The important phase therefore is Step 4 – what did you learn from the article? How are you going to apply it? What will the effect of applying the knowledge be?

Sometimes, the most important thing that you learn will be that you actually don't know enough about a particular topic. That will put you in Step 1 of the cycle – you've identified a gap in your knowledge. You'll then need to go to Step 2 and work out the best way that you can fill the gap. And then just do it, and record its impact on your work.

The PSSA/AlphaPharm Distance Learning programme

If you are not already subscribed to this, it may be interesting for you to follow up on it. Two programmes are offered, one for pharmacists and pharmacist's assistants, and the other for front shop staff. Both are informative and practical, and you can either follow them on line, or you can receive the material in a hard copy version.

The topics to be covered in Distance Learning for pharmacists and pharmacist's assistants in 2017 are: acne, stroke, insomnia, diabetes and ear problems. For more information, go to www.insightcpd.co.za or phone Glynis van der Watt, 011 706 6939.