

Chapter 19

Continuing Professional Development: Supporting the Complex Role of Today's Physician

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ABSTRACT

Continuing professional development is a critical responsibility within the complex role of today's physician. This chapter provides an overview of continuing professional development for physicians. The authors propose self-determination theory (SDT) as a foundational framework for discussing physician continuing professional development. They also address a variety of motivating factors for physicians being involved in continuing professional development. These factors include regulatory requirements, continued competence, career planning, and their own commitment to learn. Lastly, the authors include a discussion of various continuing professional development formats and the benefits of each, as well as challenges and barriers to effective continuing education.

INTRODUCTION

By this point in the book, readers will have already read descriptions of the joys and challenges of many years spent learning and training to finally begin their careers as practicing physicians. The formal medical education and training that physicians have participated in prior to the initiation of the practice phase of their career will generally have run anywhere between 7 and 15 years. Usually when one reaches such a monumental goal for which they have spent as many years preparing, he or she might see it as an end point, a finish line, or a destination. In the professional field of medicine, however, these accomplished individuals have achieved this feat, only to *begin* practicing. Merriam-Webster defines the term *practice*

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as “To perform or work at repeatedly so as to become proficient” or “To train by repeated exercises” (Practice, 2019). Given the high stakes and constantly evolving nature of medicine, extensive continuing professional development is a necessary correlate to maintaining success throughout the duration of a physician’s medical practice.

BACKGROUND

The concept of continuing professional development (CPD) has been described by many throughout the literature and includes a variety of permutations (Academy of Royal Medical Colleges, 1999; Filipe, Silva, Stulting, 2014); World Health Organization, 2010). For the purpose of this chapter, we will use the definition provided by the World Federation for Medical Education (WFME). The WFME describes continuing professional development as the following,

all activities that doctors undertake, formally and informally, in order to maintain, update, develop and enhance their knowledge, skills, and attitudes in response to the needs of their patients. Engaging in CPD is a professional obligation but also a prerequisite for enhancing the quality of health care. The strongest motivating factor for continuous professional life-long learning is the will and desire to maintain professional quality.

Worldwide, continuing professional development has evolved from continuing medical education (CME) and differs in a number of ways (Table 1). Continuing professional development is an expectation of practice in many professional fields. However, in medicine, physicians are not expected to practice using only what they have learned throughout their previous formal education and training. Each is, instead, expected to continue to grow and develop in areas not only directly related to clinical care, but also as a researcher, a leader, a teacher, someone who looks out for their own well-being as closely as they do for that of their patients, as well as other areas that contribute to them being well-rounded physicians in the current age. In a field as complex and high stakes as medicine, this can be a challenging and daunting feat. While the more recent generations of physicians seem to be acquiescing to the diverse demands of practicing today, gone are the days of the physician with expertise only in patient care.

Terms related to CPD are often used interchangeably and institutions may have varying definitions for each (e.g. faculty development, professional development, lifelong learning, continuing education, career development, continuing medical education, etc.). More recently, these terms have been more carefully defined, compared, and contrasted, advocating for each to retain their own identity while emphasizing the shared components and opportunities for complementing one another (Silver & Leslie, 2017; Davis et al., 2017). Understanding these distinctions and the role of each is certainly important, however, it is clear that all emphasize the need for continued learning beyond formal medical education training programs. More specifically, the critical point behind the lifelong learning that all of these terms represent, is that one must develop and enhance competence and a personal career path relevant to the complex nature of practicing medicine, while promoting and contributing to quality healthcare. For the purposes of this chapter, the term *continuing professional development (CPD)* will be used to encompass this overriding concept.

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