



# Continuing professional development

Guidance for all doctors

Working with doctors Working for patients

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General  
Medical  
Council

# Principles of continuing professional development

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The purpose of continuing professional development (CPD) is to help improve the safety and quality of care provided for patients and the public.

## Responsibility for personal learning

You are responsible for identifying your CPD needs, planning how those needs should be addressed and undertaking CPD that will support your professional development and practice.

## Reflection

*Good Medical Practice* requires you to reflect regularly on your standards of medical practice.

## Scope of practice

You must remain competent and up to date in all areas of your practice.

## Individual and team learning

Your CPD activities should aim to maintain and improve the standards of your own practice and also those of any teams in which you work.

## Identification of needs

Your CPD activities should be shaped by assessments of both your professional needs and the needs of the service and the people who use it.

## Outcomes

You must reflect on what you have learnt through your CPD and record any impact (or expected future impact) on your performance and practice.

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# Continuing professional development: guidance for all doctors

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Published June 2012

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# About this guidance

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## Who this guidance is for

This guidance is for doctors, but it may also be of use to employers, doctors' representatives, patients and the public.

### Doctors

This guidance explains what we expect you to do to maintain and improve your practice through CPD. It will help you understand and meet the CPD requirements for revalidation.

### Organisations

Employers and those contracting doctors' services are responsible for making sure their workforce is up to date and practising to the appropriate standards. Doctors will be better able to maintain these standards in organisations that foster a culture of learning. This guidance will help everyone involved in developing the practice of individual doctors to understand what we, as the regulator, expect of their medical workforce so they can support doctors in meeting our standards.

### Patients and the public

This guidance will also help patients and the public understand what we expect doctors to do to stay up to date and improve the safety and quality of care they provide. It may also encourage patients to give feedback to doctors about areas where CPD may benefit their care.

## Our role in CPD

We have a legal duty to promote high standards of medical education. This includes the CPD of doctors once they have completed their undergraduate medical education and postgraduate training.

Our core guidance for doctors, *Good Medical Practice*, sets out the principles and values on which good practice is founded and which we believe make a good doctor. It places a duty on you to keep your knowledge and skills up to date throughout your working life by regularly taking part in activities that maintain and further develop your competence and performance.

This guidance explains how you should fulfil that duty. Revalidation will confirm that you are doing so effectively.

## How this guidance applies to you

This guidance covers planning, carrying out and evaluating your CPD, and also how your CPD will be considered when you come to revalidate. It describes approaches to CPD that all doctors should be able to follow.

This guidance does not tell you what CPD, or how much CPD, is right for you. You will need to judge how best to apply the principles of this guidance to your own practice and professional development.

In this guidance the terms 'you must' and 'you should' are used in the following ways.

- 'You must' is used for an overriding duty or principle.
- 'You should' is used when we are providing an explanation of how you will meet the overriding duty.
- 'You should' is also used where the duty or principle will not apply in all situations or circumstances, or where there are factors outside your control that affect whether or how you can follow this guidance.

In this guidance, the term 'practice' includes all the professional roles that you have now and those that you plan to take on in the future.

References to patient care should be interpreted widely. If you don't care for patients directly, you should consider how your work improves patient care as a whole.

The term 'team' includes anyone with whom you work to deliver care. What constitutes a team and your role in it may change depending on the context in which you work. For example, you may work in a team of doctors performing different roles or in a multidisciplinary team, or you may be part of a service bringing together a wide range of health and social care professionals. You may work with several different teams at any one time. If you don't work in a formal team structure, you should still think about how you work with others to deliver high quality services.



# What is CPD?

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- 1** CPD is any learning outside of undergraduate education or postgraduate training that helps you maintain and improve your performance. It covers the development of your knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours across all areas of your professional practice. It includes both formal and informal learning activities.

## The aims of CPD

- 2** Your CPD activities should maintain and improve:
  - a** the quality of care you give your patients and the public
  - b** the standards of the teams and the services in which you work.
- 3** Your CPD should keep you up to date and competent in all the work that you do. It should affirm what you do well, address areas requiring improvement and explore new knowledge, skills and behaviours.

## Why CPD is important for doctors

- 4** CPD helps you update what you learnt at medical school and during postgraduate training to reflect changes in practice, changes in the needs of patients and the service, and changes in society's expectations of the way doctors work.

- 5** Effective CPD will help you to anticipate and respond to these changing demands. It enables you to keep up to date and fit to practise, and to maintain the professional standards required of you throughout your career.
- 6** You will need to bring a summary of your CPD activities to your annual appraisal to show that you have met the requirements for revalidation.
- 7** CPD can also support specific changes in your practice, which may enhance your career opportunities and work satisfaction. For example, it can support you to work more effectively within multiprofessional teams and to develop leadership and educational skills.

# Planning your CPD

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- 8** When thinking about your learning and development needs you should be guided by the goal of improving patient safety and the care provided by you and the teams in which you work.

## You are responsible for your personal learning

- 9** You are responsible for:
- a** identifying your CPD needs
  - b** planning how you will address those needs
  - c** undertaking CPD activities that are relevant to your practice and will support your professional development.
- 10** You must consider your CPD needs across the whole of your professional practice. This includes both the clinical and the non-clinical aspects of your practice, and any management, research, and teaching or training responsibilities you have.
- 11** Your CPD activities should also help you deal with change and potential change. This might involve changes to your professional roles throughout your career, preparing you to deal with the changing nature of medical knowledge and practice, and the development of the teams and the services in which you work.

- 12** Not all CPD opportunities will be planned. Opportunities for informal learning and reflection about your performance will arise spontaneously from your day-to-day practice. This can be one of the most fruitful forms of CPD because it links directly to your everyday work.<sup>1,2</sup>

## Planning your CPD to meet the needs of others

- 13** You must think about how your learning will support the needs of your patients and teams, the organisations in which you work and the wider community. You should therefore ask for, and be receptive to, advice from others about your learning and development. This includes seeking feedback from patients, carers and colleagues.
- 14** Your appraisal and job planning discussions, along with your agreed personal development plan (PDP), will help you identify and address your needs and those of others. These tools should also help you divide your CPD activities across the scope of your work to reflect your needs in particular areas. They will also help employers (or contractors) identify, coordinate and resource the learning and development needs for all staff.
- 15** You should be prepared to review your PDP throughout the year in the light of discussions with your appraiser and others to ensure it remains relevant to your needs. Planning and evaluating your CPD needs and opportunities should be managed on an ongoing basis, not just at your appraisal.

## Reflecting on your practice

- 16** Reflection drives change in performance and is the key to effective CPD.<sup>3</sup> *Good Medical Practice* requires you to reflect regularly on your standards of medical practice.<sup>4</sup>
- 17** You must reflect on all aspects of your professional work. This should be informed by discussion with others and by specific evidence, such as data from audit, complaints and compliments, significant events, information about service improvements, results of workplace-based assessments and feedback from patients and colleagues.
- 18** You must also reflect on what you have learnt from your CPD activities and record whether your CPD has had any impact (or is expected to have any impact) on your performance and practice. This will help you assess whether your learning is adding value to the care of your patients and improving the services in which you work.
- 19** Reflection must be integral to your PDP and appraisal and job planning discussions.

# Carrying out your CPD

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## Content of your CPD activities

- 20** You must remain competent and up to date in all areas of your professional practice.
- 21** The content of your CPD is for you to determine in discussion with your appraiser. The resulting PDP will influence many of your learning objectives.
- 22** Our *Good Medical Practice Framework for appraisal and revalidation*<sup>5</sup> provides a useful structure for discussing your CPD during appraisal. Your CPD activities should take account of the domains and attributes in the Framework. But you don't have to match your CPD against every element of the Framework. The domains are:
  - a** knowledge, skills and performance
  - b** safety and quality
  - c** communication, partnership and teamwork
  - d** maintaining trust.
- 23** You should look for developmental opportunities across all four domains and not confine your learning to the areas of your practice in which you feel most comfortable.

- 24** Unless you have given us specific undertakings or had conditions attached to your registration as a result of involvement in our fitness to practise procedures we will not prescribe the CPD activities you should take part in.
- 25** However, from time to time, we will identify and publicise issues that we believe may be relevant to the CPD of all doctors or to particular groups of doctors. These issues might relate, for example, to particular developments in medical practice, to aspects of professionalism arising from our research and regulatory activities, or to relevant changes in the law. It will be up to you, in discussion with your appraiser, to decide whether those issues are relevant to your own practice and whether they should be addressed through your CPD.

## Organising your CPD

- 26** There is no single correct way to do CPD. How you meet your learning needs will depend on your own preferred ways of learning, what you are trying to learn and the opportunities available to you. You should, however, seek a variety of activities that allow you to learn in different ways. There is evidence that undertaking a range of different CPD activities to address a particular learning need is likely to be more effective than one-off events.<sup>6</sup>

- 27** Your CPD should be a mix of formal and informal learning. It should include activities that take place locally where you work, as well as at regional, national or international levels. It may be helpful to set out how particular activities will support the learning objectives in your PDP, and to discuss with relevant colleagues what resources you will need.
- 28** Some of your learning should aim to help improve how your teams work, their contribution to the organisation in which they are based and how you work within those teams. In a multiprofessional team, for example, it may help to develop leadership skills. If your CPD is focusing on making the team more effective, it should be undertaken alongside team colleagues.
- 29** You should participate in peer-based learning in your specialty or field of practice. There are many ways to do this, such as peer reviews and peer tutoring. You can also learn in specialty networks, or through CPD schemes or programmes run by medical royal colleges or professional associations. Discussing and disseminating your learning to others may help consolidate your learning and enhance that of the team.

## Amount of CPD

- 30** It is your responsibility to do enough appropriate CPD to remain up to date and fit to practise in your work and to be able to demonstrate this at your appraisals. This applies whether you are in full-time or less than full-time practice.



- 31** Most medical royal colleges and faculties have developed CPD schemes or guidance to support doctors in maintaining and developing their professional standards in their specialty. The colleges and faculties require doctors participating in these schemes to obtain a specified number of CPD credits over five years.<sup>7</sup>
- 32** We don't require you to be a member of a college or faculty CPD scheme, to undertake a specific number of hours of CPD each year or to acquire a particular number of CPD credits. However, you may find that participating in such a scheme is helpful, both in keeping up to date and in being able to show that you are practising to the appropriate standards in your specialty.
- 33** Even if you are not a member of a formal CPD scheme, you will still need to show how you are keeping up to date and following recognised best practice in your field or specialty.

## Career breaks

- 34** If you are considering taking a break from working as a doctor, or are already doing so, you should discuss with your college, faculty, postgraduate deanery, employing organisation or appraiser what steps you might need to take to stay up to date in your specialty while you are away. You should also get advice on any support you will need to help you return to practice.

- 35** If you decide to keep your licence to practise during a career break, we expect you to keep up to date and participate in revalidation. To revalidate, you will need to show that you have undertaken appropriate CPD. Further information about revalidation and career breaks can be found on our website at [www.gmc-uk.org/doctors/revalidation/12382.asp](http://www.gmc-uk.org/doctors/revalidation/12382.asp).

## Using CPD to support your revalidation

- 36** Revalidation is the process through which doctors show periodically that they are up to date and fit to practise. You can use revalidation to show your CPD is appropriate for the work that you do and to discuss your developmental needs.
- 37** To revalidate, you will need to participate in an annual appraisal covering the whole of your practice.
- 38** Evidence of your CPD activities will be one of several pieces of information you will need to discuss at your appraisal to show that you are keeping up to date and working to enhance the quality of your practice.
- 39** Your appraiser will want to know what you think the information says about your practice and how you plan to develop or change your practice as a result.

- 40** We don't prescribe the CPD activities you have to do to revalidate, but you must consider the advice in this guidance and follow the recognised best practice for CPD in your field or specialty. If you are not clear about the CPD that is appropriate for your work, you should discuss this with relevant colleagues (such as a supervisor) and your appraiser.
- 41** You can find further information about revalidation in our guidance.<sup>5,8</sup> In addition, the medical royal colleges and faculties have developed specialty-specific guidance on revalidation for their members that includes advice on CPD.

## Evaluating the impact of your CPD

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- 42** Often it won't be possible to measure directly the effect of a particular CPD activity on patient outcomes. But this should not diminish the value of the activity. However, you must try to identify ways in which your CPD activities could help to improve the quality of care provided for your patients and the public.
- 43** You should use evidence from your practice, including research, audit, patient and colleague feedback, and other quality improvement information, to reflect accurately on your performance and that of your team. You should then commit to making any necessary improvements to your own and your team's work as part of your professional development. In due course, you should reflect on whether your CPD activities have helped you to meet your objectives and, if not, whether you need to do any further learning or other activities. Research suggests that committing to improving performance in this way is more likely to lead to changes in behaviour.<sup>9,10</sup>
- 44** When you are thinking about the outcomes of your learning, you may find it helpful to reflect on the questions set out below.<sup>11</sup>

## Questions to help you assess your learning

### Knowledge of practice

- Have you identified learning priorities based on your practice?
- Are you developing and monitoring your learning needs and opportunities on an ongoing basis?

### Scanning the environment

- Are you able to identify learning opportunities and to integrate this learning into your performance and practice?

### Managing your knowledge in practice

- Have you used a PDP to manage your CPD planning, participation, reflection and impact?
- Have you gathered evidence of your CPD activities and recorded the impact of your learning?

### Raising and answering questions

- Are you able to raise a question about, or set objectives for, your practice or performance, seek evidence, come to a conclusion about the question and show how this may impact on your practice or performance or meet your learning goals?
- Are you able to analyse, reflect on and connect your learning to your standards of medical practice? Have you considered how your learning and experience of your learning may be improved and used to plan future goals?

## Practice assessment

- Have you identified and are you able to use a range of tools and processes, such as audit, colleague and patient feedback and review of significant events, to identify areas for improvement or development in performance?

## Recording your CPD activities

- 45 Keeping a record of your reflection, your learning needs, your activities and learning outcomes is part of the learning process. It will help you validate your learning and support discussions with your appraiser, employer or others about your learning needs.
- 46 Even if the learning has been informal and has arisen directly from events in the workplace, it is important to document what you have learnt. This will assist with your appraisal discussion and revalidation.
- 47 A range of organisations, including the medical royal colleges and faculties, specialist associations and professional trade bodies, may be able to help you manage your CPD using an online portfolio or other similar tools.
- 48 We won't normally ask to see details of your CPD activities. However, *Good Medical Practice* requires you to be honest and trustworthy and act with integrity. So you must make sure that you record your CPD activities fully and accurately.

## Ensuring quality and value

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- 49** You are responsible for making sure that your CPD activities are relevant and effective and provide good value.
  
- 50** Some organisations accredit events and activities for CPD. For information about CPD accreditation and quality assurance of specific CPD activities, you should contact the CPD provider, your medical royal college or faculty, specialist association, postgraduate deanery or CPD lead.
  
- 51** We don't endorse or accredit particular CPD activities. We don't give CPD points or credits for learning activities and we don't hold lists of CPD providers.

# The role of others

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- 52** Although this guidance is focused on your responsibility to keep up to date through CPD, others have a role in helping you do this.

## Our role

- 53** We set out the framework of principles and behaviours that should guide your CPD activities. Where appropriate, we will also raise awareness about trends, issues or opportunities that may be relevant to your CPD.

## Employers and contractors of doctors' services, and commissioners of medical education

- 54** Employers and contractors of doctors' services are responsible for making sure their workforce is competent, up to date and able to meet the needs of the service. They should maintain and develop the skills of all of their medical staff whether they are consultants, staff grade, specialty or associate specialist (SAS) doctors, sessional general practitioners (GPs), locum doctors or trainees. They should also facilitate access to the resources (including the time to learn) that will support this.
- 55** Employers and contractors should use the appraisal system, alongside job planning and PDPs, to plan and coordinate the CPD needs of their staff, to discuss how best those needs should be met, and to monitor the effectiveness of doctors' CPD activities.



- 56** Doctors will be better able to maintain and improve their performance in organisations that have a culture of learning and information systems that allow doctors to measure their outcomes and the quality of care they provide.

## Responsible officers and medical managers

- 57** Doctors with managerial responsibilities should do their best to make sure that the individuals and teams they manage are able to fulfil their professional duties. They should make sure their teams are appropriately supported and developed and are clear about their objectives.<sup>12</sup> Medical managers should support the staff they manage to complete the learning and development activities identified by appraisal and performance reviews.
- 58** Doctors who are responsible officers in a designated organisation will have additional responsibilities set out in statutory regulations and must take account of any guidance produced by the departments of health or their organisation.<sup>13</sup>

## Systems regulators

**59** Organisations such as the Care Quality Commission in England, the Health Inspectorate Wales, the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority in Northern Ireland and Healthcare Improvement Scotland are responsible for overseeing the quality of care provided by organisations across the UK. This includes making sure that organisations have arrangements in place for staff to obtain appropriate training, professional development, supervision and appraisals so that they can deliver care and treatment to an appropriate standard.

## Medical royal colleges, faculties, specialist associations and other professional organisations

- 60** Medical royal colleges, faculties, specialist associations and professional trade bodies are some of the main providers of CPD.
- 61** All medical royal colleges and faculties have published guidance on how CPD in their specialty should be carried out. Most of the medical royal colleges and faculties also have formal CPD schemes that are based on the Academy of Medical Royal Colleges' document *The ten principles for college/faculty CPD schemes*. These schemes will give you a range of tools and advice to help you record and manage your CPD effectively, and guidance on professional standards in a specialty. Many colleges and faculties have accreditation and approval systems in place that consider the educational quality of the CPD activities they approve.

- 62** Medical schools, higher education institutions, professional trade bodies and other organisations also provide a range of helpful courses and learning materials.
- 63** Information about some of the key organisations involved in CPD and some suggested further reading are provided on our website [www.gmc-uk.org/education/continuing\\_professional\\_development.asp](http://www.gmc-uk.org/education/continuing_professional_development.asp).

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Published June 2012

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ISBN: 978-0-901458-58-2

The GMC is a charity registered in England and Wales (1089278)  
and Scotland (SC037750)

Code: GMC/CPDG/0216

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