

Delivering quality continuing professional development for physical therapists

Guideline

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WCPT guidelines are produced to assist member organisations and others to raise the quality of physical therapy. They may provide guidance on standards criteria or courses of action in areas relevant to physical therapy education research practice or policy. They are not mandatory but designed to assist the implementation of WCPT's policies.

[This guideline is currently under review. A revised version is due to be published August 2020.](#)

Delivering quality continuing professional development for physical therapists

1 Introduction

1.1 Purpose

This guideline has been developed for the use of WCPT member organisations intent on supporting physical therapists in their endeavours to maintain the currency of their professional education and thus deliver high quality evidence based services to their clients/patients.

While the guideline has been developed for and with input from member organisations of WCPT, the intent is that it may be used as well by countries where physical therapy associations and education programmes do not currently exist and where the profession is not represented in WCPT.

This guideline is part of a package of resources designed to support physical therapy professional organisations in their efforts to implement the WCPT policy statement: Education, specifically in relation to post qualifying education and lifelong learning.¹

There are differing levels of entry level education for physical therapists and this guideline relates to the quality of continuing professional development programmes, not the level offered.

Other policies and guidelines intended to assist in the delivery of education policy include:

- Policy statement: Education.¹
- WCPT guideline for a standard evaluation process for accreditation/recognition of physical therapist professional entry-level education programmes.²
- WCPT guideline for physical therapist professional entry level education.³
- WCPT guideline for qualifications of faculty for physical therapist professional entry level programmes.⁴
- WCPT guideline for the clinical education component of the physical therapist professional entry level programme.⁵

1.2 Background

Continuing professional development (CPD) describes the systematic, ongoing structured process of learning that underpins professional practice. CPD enables physical therapists who have completed an entry level programme to maintain, develop and enhance their personal and professional skills, knowledge and behaviours, and ongoing competence to practise. This, in turn, advances practice, service delivery and ultimately outcomes for patients/clients. All physical therapists should participate in learning activities that maintain or increase their professional competence.

Continuing professional development (CPD) and continuing professional education (CPE) are terms that are often used interchangeably. CPD has a broader scope than CPE. CPD learning opportunities can be both formal (eg seminars, workshops, accredited programmes of study) and informal (eg personal reflection on practice, personal development, shadowing others, independent study).⁶⁻⁷ Both formal and informal opportunities are valid if they maintain and/or increase the physical therapist's competence.

Physical therapists performing services of a professional nature need to have a broad range of knowledge, skills, and abilities. Thus, the concept of professional competence should be interpreted broadly. Accordingly, programmes contributing to the development and maintenance of both technical and non-technical professional skills should be recognised as acceptable continuing professional development.

Selection of learning activities should be a thoughtful, reflective process addressing the individual physical therapist's current work and future work plans, current knowledge and skills level, and desired or needed additional competencies to meet future opportunities and/or professional responsibilities.

1.3 Recording, measuring and evaluating CPD

Broadly speaking there are two different approaches to recording, measuring and evaluating CPD. One focuses on the quantity of learning ie is input-based approach. The other focuses on the quality of learning and its impact on practice ie an outcomes-based approach.

The continuing education unit (CEU) is an inputs-based approach used in continuing education programmes, particularly those required in a licensed or registered profession in order for the professional to maintain the currency of the licence or registration. CEUs are often defined in terms of hours of participation in a recognised programme. Evidence of completion of continuing education requirements may be mandated by registration bodies, professional organisations, or governmental licensing boards. CEUs may be provided to employers as evidence of education or training pertinent to employment.

One standard for a CEU is defined as ten clock hours (sixty minutes) of instruction (instruction includes lectures, practical skills development, attendance at recognised seminars).⁸ Another points based system awards 1 or 2 points per hour of accredited activity, depending on the activity; with a minimum number of points to be gained in every three-year learning cycle.⁹

Certificates of attendance form another means of evaluating CPD participation. These may be provided by course providers, the course itself having been evaluated as part of an accreditation process, either by a professional organisation or other accrediting body.

Self declaration and random auditing of CPD is carried out by some registration bodies, for example the Health Professions Council in the UK.¹⁰ Audits require the submission of evidence that CPD activities have been carried out in a designated period. The evidence is assessed against published criteria by a panel which includes experienced peer reviewers convened for the purpose. This is an example of an outcomes-based approach.

1.4 Target audience

This guideline provides a basis for the evaluation of CPD activities and may be used by:

- WCPT member organisations
- potential WCPT member organisations
- national physical therapy organisations
- physical therapy educators
- health and education authorities
- monitoring and regulatory bodies
- government policy makers
- others, who have an interest in providing physical therapist continuing professional education programmes

1.5 Application

The guideline may be used for a variety of purposes. It provides a means of describing the nature and characteristics of quality physical therapist CPD activities and represents general expectations about standards for the conduct of courses.

The guideline is an important external source of reference for designing and developing new physical therapist CPD courses. It provides for variety and flexibility in the design of courses and encourages innovation within an agreed framework; for example to accommodate differing levels of physical therapist entry-level education.

The guideline also provides a framework for quality assurance purposes. It enables the learning outcomes specified for a particular course to be reviewed and evaluated against agreed general expectations about standards.

The guideline may also inform physical therapists, managers, service providers, regulatory authorities and others delivering or requiring CPD.

This guideline may be modified and interpreted by individual WCPT member organisations, course providers and registration authorities within the context of their situation, whilst aiming to maintain the quality CPD offerings they are designed to facilitate.

2 Guideline

CPD activities for physical therapists should meet the following minimal standards of quality:

2.1 The CPD activity

Each CPD activity should:

- adhere to national policies and relevant WCPT policies and guidelines including WCPT's ethical principles¹¹⁻¹² and standards of physical therapy practice¹³⁻¹⁴
- be planned in response to needs identified for a particular group of physical therapists
- have specific written learning outcomes (objectives) based on identified needs
- be planned and conducted by appropriately qualified individuals - qualified individuals may be physical therapists, other health professionals, experts in fields associated with the practice of physical therapy (such as lawyers, health administrators, philosophers) and individuals with specific relevant experience, for example expert patients
- be based on referenced scientific evidence, reflect evidence in practice, and clearly label personal experience or hypotheses
- provide programme content and instructional methods based on the specified learning outcomes
- include methods to evaluate a participant's attainment of the specified learning outcomes

2.2 Processes relating to issuing of licences/registrations

The provider of a CPD offering should provide:

- information to potential participants that includes:
 - a course description
 - a course outline specifying the amount of time designated to each content area
 - a list of course presenters and their qualifications for delivering the course
 - the number of contact hours
 - the target audience for the CPD offering
 - the prerequisites and requirements for entry to and successful completion of the CPD offering
 - whether continuing education units (CEUs) are offered and on what basis

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- a safe and supportive learning environment
 - learning resources
 - where relevant, certificates of completion that record the award of CEUs

2.3 CPD Promotion

Promotional materials and brochures should contain:

- rationale for the programme
- target audience
- instructional level
- learning outcomes
- objectives, based on the length of the programme
- programme description or outline
- content described based on best available evidence in practice
- the maximum number of participants for a laboratory/demonstration course
- course presenter(s) and qualifications
- instructional methods that are appropriate to the content
- source and number of CEUs
- the fee
- continuing education course provider's contact details
- statement about the provider's fees and cancellation policy
- course title that adequately represents the programme content; and may also include
- attendee endorsements of the programme

2.4 CPD programme content

A quality CPD programme should include:

- handout materials which are:
 - comprehensive and up-to-date
 - contain references to bibliographic and original peer reviewed research appropriate to the programme content
- instructor(s) who:
 - establish rapport with the audience
 - review the programme objectives
 - are knowledgeable and provide up-to-date content
 - disclose, in advance of the programme, any bias or proprietary interest in any product, device, service, or materials discussed during the programme
 - cite scientific sources and discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the scientific evidence relevant to the topic

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- use appropriate teaching methods for the stated learning outcomes
 - are open to questions and discussion
 - show enthusiasm and generate curiosity for the content
 - are genuinely interested in the needs and concerns of the audience
 - use teaching strategies that engage participants in active learning
 - use a variety of instructional methods
 - instruct at a pace that allows the participants to process the content
 - maintain a teaching pace that is appropriate for the majority of the audience
 - summarise the content and reemphasise key points on occasions
 - provide feedback to participants and appropriately respond to questions from the audience
 - programme evaluation tools which:
 - are available for use by participants to evaluate the programme
 - assess the achievement of the student learning outcomes
 - identification of any conflict of interest, for example sponsorship by a company providing a product
 - an environment which:
 - is conducive to learning and meets the needs of the participants
 - allows for participant interaction
 - accommodates individuals with special needs

This includes online environments where CPD takes the form of distance learning or a mixed delivery method.

- an indication of the instructional level, for example:
 - basic/introductory - this level assumes that participants have little information within the areas to be covered so that the focus of the activity is a general orientation and increased awareness
 - intermediate - this level assumes that the participants have a general familiarity with the topic, so it focuses on increased understanding and application
 - advanced - this level assumes thorough familiarity with the topic and focuses on advanced techniques, recent advances, and future directions
 - various/mixed - this category indicates that a single level cannot be determined. It is intended for programme in which the instructional level may vary

Glossary (www.world.physio/resources/glossary)

Continuing education units ⁸

Continuing professional development (CPD)

Continuing professional education (CPE)

Qualification

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