Continuing Professional Development for Pharmacist’s Assistants

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WHAT IS CPD?
Continuing Professional Development is a conscious process by which professional people continuously enhance their knowledge, understanding, skills and personal qualities throughout their professional careers. It encompasses a range of activities including continuing education and supplementary training.

Should pharmacist’s assistants participate in CPD?
You know everything you need to know, don’t you? After all, you have studied (and passed) and you read about things in the pharmacy all the time, don’t you? Especially package inserts when there’s a new medicine. So you don’t need to participate in CPD activities, right?

Wrong! One of the most important reasons that health care workers engage in CPD is to affirm their professional competence. Skills development in the workplace has become very important, not just for people entering employment and people who need to develop new skills, but also for people who already have skills in areas that are continually evolving. It’s important for everyone to have a personal development plan, and to commit the necessary time and resources to it.

It is quite possible that, at some future stage, the Pharmacy Council will make CPD mandatory for everyone registered with Council, and it is good idea to begin now so that it becomes a way of life.

What to do and how to do it
At this stage, it’s entirely up to you. You need to evaluate current practice. How do your knowledge, understanding and skills tie in with the work you do? Are there gaps in your knowledge?

Use the CPD cycle to guide you in your CPD activities.

The CPD Cycle

**Evaluation** - This is reflection on practice. What do I need to know? What do I need to be able to do? Identify your learning needs and decide how you are going to improve your knowledge.

**Planning** - Now what? How can I learn? What do I need to do?

**Action** - This is the implementation phase. Something must happen here.


**Basis of the portfolio**
It is quite likely that the Council will introduce a portfolio system of CPD. You have an advantage already, if you have been using the “Expand Your Portfolio” questions correctly!

A portfolio is a record of your professional development and experience. It must be specific to your work practices and roles. An important aspect is that it is not just a record of activities - in order to be valuable, there must be both reflective and evaluative content.

If used correctly, portfolios can be useful as an historic, current and future learning tool.

Where can I find CPD activities?
Obviously, talks given by manufacturers are not only informative, they’re fun! But it can be difficult to make the time to go out during the week, when family and other commitments must be met. Many women also prefer not to go out on their own in the evenings.

As long as you follow the CPD cycle, and in particular the final reflection phase, you can use many different activities, such as reading articles in journals, to meet your CPD needs. There are also distance learning courses that are very useful because you can do them in the comfort of your own home, at a time that suits you.

The PSSA/AlphaPharm Distance Learning Programme
This offers pharmacists and pharmacist’s assistants useful, practical, up-to-date information that enables them to provide optimal pharmaceutical care to their patients.

Topics covered in the past include Irritable Bowel Syndrome, immunity and allergy, GORD (gastro-oesophageal reflux disease), malaria and acne. This year, two modules have already been offered – Eye care and Screening services in pharmacies.

The PSSA/AlphaPharm Distance Learning Programme consists of a series of 5 study modules on different subjects which are dispatched at 2 monthly intervals. Each module is accompanied by a multiple choice question paper and an answer postcard. The postcards are returned for evaluation and results posted to participants together with an answer and analysis sheet. Successful participants who pass 4 of the 5 modules will receive a certificate at the end of the year.

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