



In the first article of our new series on CPD and lifelong learning, Alex Webster examines areas of professional healthcare education

What is CPD?

You may have heard the term CPD banded about in recent months, as the General Optical Council (GOC) considered a change to the continuing education and training (CET) scheme. With a last minute u-turn from the GOC, we find ourselves at the start of a new three-year CET cycle and any changes towards CPD won't now take place until at least 2022. However, what is CPD and why am I still writing about it?

CPD is the acronym for continuing professional development. In the UK, other healthcare regulators use the term CPD for their registrants' professional education schemes that enable them to revalidate a practitioner's competency to perform their role. So why does the GOC use the term continuing education and training, or CET as it is known? This comes down to legislation and the wording of the changes to the Opticians Act in 2005, where 'continuing education and training' is written into law.

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

So, what's in a name? Well, quite a lot actually. If we look at the difference between CET and CPD in the world of healthcare regulation, there can seem to be unconformity between 'training and education' and 'professional development'. The differences don't just stop at words; they have played a part in shaping the culture of continuing/lifelong learning we have – or don't have depending on how you look at it – in our industry.

For those of you reading this who have partners, friends or family working in other regulated healthcare roles, you may already be familiar with some of the ways they approach continuous learning for their job and career that differ from optics.

As head of CET for ABDO, one of my greatest concerns is that there can be an attitude amongst some GOC registrants of, "Why do I need to do CET?" Although never an intention, the CET scheme forces



CPD is about a lifelong learning journey

registrants to obtain points to prove they have in some way experienced some education and, by doing so, does not support and encourage registrants to become responsible for their personal development as an eyecare professional. This may be the biggest failing of the current scheme we have in place. Although the GOC introduced

professional development plans on the MyCET site, and requires completion of a reflective statement following a peer discussion, without education around these resources it is difficult for registrants to embrace them and actually utilise them for their development.

Many of us came to optics on a less than straight path and may have a degree or other qualifications in other subjects, all of which helps to mould the opticians we are. It seems likely, in my estimations, that the majority of people registered as a dispensing optician with the GOC, including those on the speciality contact lens register, will not have an honours degree in dispensing, but instead a level-six qualification or equivalent, depending on time of qualification.

This background is important in understanding why we may be reluctant to consider 'lifelong' professional education as a necessity. It's simply not how we have been trained to think, and that is also one of the big differences between optics and

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other healthcare professions. In general, throughout our 'undergraduate' training, we are not always taught to consider our education as a lifelong process and that achieving qualification is actually to reach the start line – not the finish line.

CONTINUING YOUR JOURNEY

So back to the question 'what is CPD?' A quick Google will bring up many companies and organisations telling you what CPD is. It is worth a look and I am sure they are all correct for their professions. What I want to consider here is what is CPD for our industry and the question: "Why am I still writing about it?"

Let's take the first word – *continuous*. This is the first hurdle I think many people need a little help to get over. To consider the race analogy again, once that letter lands on your doorstep confirming you are now FBDO, that is the beginning of your journey. And actually it isn't a race, it is a journey – your personal journey. That journey may take you very far from the beginning. Maybe you will become an optometrist, the CEO of an optical company or go to work in specialist hospital practice; who knows?

But for many that journey will always be close to home, often in a High Street practice working day-to-day with your patients. Some will have breaks in their journey for family, health or other reasons. However, wherever your journey takes you

it is still a journey. No-one can stand still: research is always being undertaken, our understanding of pathology is developing, technology is advancing, new products are being developed, our High Streets are changing, the way people engage with us is expanding, our patient demographics are in flux. All of these things, and so much more, mean we have to ensure we are continuously up-to-date to enable us to provide a relevant and safe service to our patients.

DEVELOPING YOUR PERSONAL PLAN

So, if we can agree that education must be continuous throughout our careers, let's look at the other word – *development*. This is really where CET and CPD differ. If we successfully complete our CET cycle, what have we done? We have stayed on the register, which is very important, but what has that education achieved?

For many, hopefully, the CET sessions you have taken part in have been enlightening and have had a positive influence on your clinical practice. For some though, the session may have only been attended to gain the points or cover the competency, with no actual learning having taken place as there was no interest in the content and education. For those experiencing the latter, does this help anyone, optician or patient? The answer is no. The optician is annoyed at being forced to do something they didn't see the point in, and the public don't benefit either.

So, how could this situation be improved? I believe it comes from taking ownership of our professional education duties and lifelong education. If we can get over that first hurdle and say: "I need to learn", then the question becomes: "What do you need to learn and what do you want to learn?" In your role what do you need to be educated about and for your personal journey, where do you want to go?

Once you have these answers, you can then look to see what education is available for you, that you can access, that is relevant to your personal plan and ultimately is more likely to engage you, allow you to develop as an eyecare professional and provide the best care you can for your patients.

FLEXIBILITY IN FULFILMENT

CET and CPD also differ in the area of what is accepted by the regulators as suitable learning. The current GOC system requires all CET sessions to be pre-approved and they have to fall within certain format criteria. When we look at most CPD schemes, a level of flexibility is allowed and often the registrant decides what is relevant learning for their role and educational plan and then *justifies* this to the regulator through some form of reflection. This can allow a wider scope of educational experience to qualify, such as tutoring and examining.

Although we have some time before this approach may be available to us in an official capacity, this does not mean we should not adopt the overall culture of a CPD approach. If a form of learning is relevant to your personal optical development journey, then you should consider doing it – whether or not you are able to achieve CET points by completing it. Obtaining CET points should not always be the goal but a consequence of a variety of learning.

In the following months, we will explore more of the cultural differences of CPD and consider how they can become part of our current CET journeys, so that we can all be ready to make changes in 2022.

Next month we will feature the first part of a two-part series on reflective practice.

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