

Definition

Australian Health Professional Regulatory Agency (AHPRA, 2011, para. 1) states "Continuing professional development (CPD) helps health professionals to maintain, improve and broaden their knowledge, expertise and competence."

Under the National Law, which governs the operations of the National Boards and AHPRA, all registered health practitioners must undertake CPD."

The Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia (NMBA, 2010) defines continuing professional development as "the means by which members of the profession maintain, improve and broaden their knowledge, expertise and competence, and develop the personal and professional qualities required throughout their professional lives. The CPD cycle involves reviewing practice, identifying learning needs, planning and participating in relevant learning activities, and reflecting on the value of those activities"

Background

Professional development of practitioners is a central concern of professional organisations which seek to provide leadership to maintain and advance the ideals of professionalism in the interests of a profession and the service it provides to the community. Royal College of Nursing, *Australia* (RCNA) is the peak professional nursing organisation in Australia that inspires, progresses and promotes the profession of nursing with a focus being professional development as well as policy analysis and development.

Continuing professional development (CPD) of nurses is one way to safeguard that nursing practice is consistent with best practice standards within the profession. Competence to practice is dependent upon acquisition and maintenance of specific nursing knowledge and skills, and can be linked to individual behaviours and abilities.

Continuing Professional development is a career long process of professional growth of nurses through the development and maintenance of continued competence within both generalist and specialist areas of practice. CPD can be stimulated by reflection or experience and other learning which may occur in a variety of ways including, but not limited to, formal award education programs.

Continuing professional development can be comprised of planned and organised learning activities beyond pre-registration education programs. In order to enhance the practice of nursing by both the individual and the profession, these activities should be diverse, promote reflective practice by the nurse, and improve and extend professional competence.

Rationale

The impact of rapid technological change and the continuing growth of nursing knowledge means that knowledge in the discipline of nursing is constantly evolving and in need of continuous revision.

Nurses assume responsibility for the quality of the service they provide and hold themselves accountable to consumers for the outcomes of the service they give. Fulfilling these responsibilities and meeting consumer expectations involves maintaining and enhancing competence, relevant to the context of practice, on a continuing basis.

The selection of learning opportunities for improving or maintaining performance in

adults is driven by individual self-assessment of learning and development needs based on experience.

Nurses develop and advance their professional knowledge and skills through flexible, formal and informal education programs designed to meet personal and professional needs and their career goals.

Royal College of Nursing, Australia recommends that:

- Employers recognise the AHPRA requirement for all health professionals, inclusive of nursing and midwifery to participate in continuing professional development and foster and encourage the participation of nurses in programs which meet the identified needs of the individual nurses and the health outcomes of consumers of health care.
- Employers provide equal access to continuing professional development to all nurses and midwives in their employ.
- While competency standards currently exist for entry to practice, nursing organisations are encouraged to continue to develop nursing competency standards for specialty and advanced practice that reflect the skills and knowledge required for advanced practice and specialist practice.
- All nurses including specialty and advanced practice nurses participate in clinical credentialing programs specific to their practice, where appropriate.
- All providers of continuing professional development act to ensure they are responsive to the professional development learning needs of nurses through continual evaluation and evolution of their programs against best practice research, quality assurance measures and professional competency standards for nursing.

Royal College of Nursing, Australia resolves to:

Continue to provide professional development opportunities for nurses through a diverse range of contemporary learning activities that are relevant and consistent to advance the nursing profession.

Take a leading role by:

- Developing professional standards in order to facilitate professional development, endorsement, credentialing and accreditation services
- Debating education and professional issues relevant to nursing standards and practice
- Encouraging, promoting and facilitating the establishment of continuing professional development programs leading to endorsement by RCNA
- Encouraging, promoting and facilitating credentialing programs for advanced practice nurses
- Providing professional support and advice to members, educators and practitioners seeking to establish continuing professional development programs for nurses to assist in the achievement of excellence in nursing practice.

Support individual professional development of nurses by:

- Providing a platform through 3LP, for nurses to participate in life long learning by planning, and accessing e-learning activities, quality research resources and tools that also enable the recording of CPD
- Promoting nurses' participation in continuing professional development activities that facilitate their individual learning objectives
- Providing advice and professional support to members to identify and meet their identified professional development needs
- Working with other health professions to identify common CPD opportunities that can be achieved in partnership with RCNA.
- Creating opportunities within RCNA professional development and education programs that may enhance individual development
- Administering scholarships that provide financial support to nurses to undertake continuing professional development education
- Working with specialist nursing organisations to develop enablers for nurses to obtain and/or maintain specialist practice credentialing where a nurse chooses this type of professional development opportunity.

References

Australian Health Practitioners Regulatory Agency (AHPRA, 2011, para.1). *Continuing Professional Development*. Retrieved 10 November, 2011 and available from <http://www.ahpra.gov.au/Education/Continuing-Professional-Development.aspx>

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