Guide to the CPD scheme

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1 Background

The Royal College of Pathologists' (RCPath) mission statement is to promote excellence in the practice of pathology and to be responsible for maintaining standards through training, assessments, examinations and professional development, to the benefit of the public.

The RCPath was one of the first medical royal colleges to launch a continuing medical education (CME) programme in 1994. The programme was broadened to embrace professional education and became known as continuing professional development (CPD) in 2000.

The RCPath expects all its UK Fellows to participate in the CPD programme or a suitable alternative, such as a scheme offered by another medical royal college. Following a CPD programme enables pathologists to remain up to date in a changing environment.

The CPD programme was opened to non-College members (currently called Affiliate members) in 1995 and was subsequently extended to Fellows resident outside the UK, although they are not required to participate.

This description is based on the General Medical Council-approved core headings prepared by the Academy of Medical Royal Colleges.

2 Definition of 'continuing professional development'

The Academy of Medical Royal Colleges has agreed a definition of CPD that is based on a definition published by the GMC in 2004,[1] in its publication entitled *Continuing Professional Development*. The RCPath accepts this as the definition of CPD.

Continuing professional development is a continuing process, outside formal undergraduate and postgraduate training, that enables individual doctors to maintain and improve standards of medical practice through the development of knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviour. CPD should also support specific changes in practice.

3 Introduction

The CPD scheme is reviewed and updated annually. It is in line with the Academy of Medical Royal Colleges' 'Ten principles for College/Faculty CPD schemes' http://www.aomrc.org.uk/doc_view/9327-10-principles-of-cpd.

This document sets out guidance for participation in the RCPath CPD scheme.

Fulfilling CPD requirements, achieving learning needs and other activities that maintain professional competence are the individual's personal responsibility. However, the RCPath considers that the continued competence of its members is in the interest of all employers and they should support these activities.

In the UK, participation in the RCPath CPD scheme will inform local appraisal and contribute to the revalidation process for medically qualified doctors. These processes will culminate in a recommendation being made to the appropriate regulatory body, currently the General Medical Council (GMC) or General Dental Council (GDC).

4 Why have a CPD scheme?

CPD includes educational and professional activities that develop the knowledge, skills, attitudes and personal effectiveness necessary for professional practice. It is an individual's responsibility to identify their learning needs and those of their employer through the appraisal process. It is important for pathologists to update themselves not only on facts, new concepts and new technologies, but also on opinion and consensus in order to improve patient care.

There is evidence that the benefits of CPD are:

- the potential to improve patient care
- keeping up to date with rapidly expanding knowledge base
- reduction in the risk of clinical isolation
- preparation for new roles, e.g. managerial, sub-specialty practice
- assurance for employers
- maintenance of the reputation of the profession and assurance to the public.

In addition, in the UK, medically qualified pathologists are required to demonstrate they are participating in CPD for the purpose of revalidation.

5 Who should participate in CPD?

All doctors, including those in non-consultant career-grade posts, and dentists who have a licence to practise are required to provide documentation that they are participating in a CPD scheme in order to keep up to date and fit to practise. Documentation of participation in, and learning from, CPD to the standards set by the RCPath are a requirement for specialist recertification.

Clinical scientists in career-grade positions (grade B or C and AfC >/=7) should undertake CPD as part of compliance with standards for laboratory accreditation.

Professional scientists affiliated to the College are entitled to participate in the CPD scheme.

All those eligible to participate in the CPD scheme but who are not Fellows of the College may apply for Affiliate membership of the RCPath in order to access the CPD scheme. Further information on Affiliate membership is available on the College website. www.rcpath.org.

Fellows can participate in a CPD scheme run by other medical royal colleges or regulatory bodies if the content is more appropriate to their practice. Fellows should notify the Professional Standards Department of their participation in an alternate scheme.

Fellows who are resident outside the UK are recommended to participate in the CPD scheme offered by their country of residence. Where this is not possible, Fellows are able to participate in the RCPath CPD scheme.

Trainees are not eligible to participate in the CPD scheme, but should register on completion of training.

6 How the CPD scheme works

The CPD year runs from 1 April to 31 March the following year. The overall five-year credit recommendation is a minimum of 250 credits. It is recommended that participants record a minimum of 50 credits per year throughout their career. The five-year total is calculated on a five-year rolling cycle basis

Normally, credits awarded by all Colleges/Faculties for CPD are based on one credit equating to one hour of educational activity.

Within the framework of the CPD scheme, pathologists are best placed to choose the activity that best reflects their educational needs and are asked to make a judgement on the value of a particular activity and only to claim credits for the educationally useful element of such activity. Individuals can claim one credit for each educationally useful hour that they consider they have achieved.

The RCPath operates three simple categories for the recording of CPD activities. These are: clinical, academic and professional.

Clinical

All educational activities that relate to the development of individual clinical or diagnostic skills or specialist knowledge update should be recorded in this category. These would include all educational meetings and conferences relevant to the specialty; local or regional postgraduate meetings; supervised learning (such as visiting a different department to learn a new technique).

Academic

Activities that contribute to the understanding of pathology or the education of yourself and others should be recorded here. You do not need to work in an academic post to claim credits in this category. These may include formal presentations; lecturing; teaching on specialty-related courses; formal examining and setting questions for professional examinations, such as FRCPath; publishing; presenting audit and research findings or postgraduate degrees and diplomas.

Professional

Professional activities are those that advance your ability to practise clinical skills and relate to employees, colleagues and patients. These would include developing national guidelines and audits; clinical review and risk management meetings, local protocol meetings and other multidisciplinary meetings; audits; clinical leadership; contribution to confidential enquiries.

There is no minimum or maximum credit limit set within these categories, but your annual return must reflect your profile of practice. It is your responsibility to ensure that you undertake a range of CPD activities that reflect the local and national needs of your practice and learning needs, and that the credits claimed are categorised correctly.

Participation in CPD and College office

In order to hold any RCPath office, for example, an elected office, or to act as an examiner, you should:

- participate in a CPD scheme such as the RCPath CPD scheme
- be up to date with CPD and make an annual return every year.

If, during your term of office, you fail to participate satisfactorily in the RCPath CPD scheme, your position as a College officer will be reviewed.

7 How CPD credits are recorded with the CPD scheme and supporting information required

CPD credits must be recorded with the College on an annual, cumulative basis. Further information on how to use the online CPD portfolio may be found here: https://www.rcpath.org/profession/continuing-professional-development-cpd/using-the-online-portfolio.html

A rolling five-year programme

A shortfall in CPD activity at the end of a fixed five-year cycle is difficult to make up. However, the use of a rolling cycle allows the average amount of activity to be maintained over five years if a shortfall occurs. The RCPath has operated a rolling cycle since 2010.

It is the individual's personal responsibility to maintain a portfolio of their activity using the online CPD portfolio. (The online CPD portfolio offers users a personalised, safe, electronic means to record CPD, store supporting information and make an electronic return to the College. It is available to all registered CPD participants.

The credits that are recorded must be:

- accompanied by relevant supporting information or a weblink to a website where the evidence may be viewed. Supporting information must demonstrate your participation or engagement in the activity for which CPD credits are being claimed. Where CPD credits are claimed for activities that are not accredited by the RCPath but were educationally usefully to you, similar evidence must be provided and should be accompanied by a reflection on learning

- educationally useful: credits should not be recorded for activities that you did not find useful
- relevant to your practice: you will need to retain a copy of your job plan and personal development plans as supporting information. The RCPath expects the relevancy of your CPD to be reviewed at appraisal.

Suggested supporting information

- Attendance records, certificates
- Personal notes.
- Emails confirming/thanking you for work done.
- Screenshots from mobile phones and other smart devices.
- Reflective notes. Reflective practice is not a mandatory requirement but is strongly encouraged for all self-accredited activities.

Making an annual CPD return

You must make an annual return between 1 April and 30 June* every year. Late returns may be accepted provided you can justify the reason.

Failure to make a return for two consecutive years will result in suspension from the scheme.

*In exceptional circumstances the College will extend the deadline.

Complaints

If you have any complaints regarding your CPD record, you may you may write to the Clinical Director for Safety and Quality.

Complaints that are not resolved will be referred to a College panel, comprising the Registrar, one Vice-President and two members of Council nominated by the President.

8 Choosing your CPD activities

The RCPath's CPD scheme allows you flexibility in selecting relevant activities, choosing your preferred learning method and deciding upon the educational value of the activity. The RCPath expects your choice of activity to be part of a planning process, normally within appraisal, and to reflect your profile of practice. The processes of CPD and appraisal are not currently linked. The RCPath supports the notion that CPD and personal development plans should be linked and believe it is the responsibility of the individual and organisation to ensure this.

9 The eligibility of activities for CPD credits

The RCPath considers it to be the individual's responsibility to assess the educational usefulness of a specific activity. This is why the RCPath only states two areas that do not attract CPD credits.

These are:

- routine clinical activity without explicit educational content
- day-to-day work, such as attending committee meetings.

The RCPath also asks providers of educational opportunities to apply for formal prospective CPD approval for the event they are organising. Details of this process are available on the College website. Providers of approved events issue attendance certificates. These certificates will normally detail the number of credits full attendance at the event would attract. One hour of education normally equates to one CPD credit. You should claim the approriate number of educationally useful credits you believe the event was worth, even if a higher number is printed on the certificate.

Some activities have educational components that are harder to quantify than others (for example watching a medical video, using an online learning tool or reading a journal). These activities are not awarded a credit tariff in the list of activities. If you wish to claim credits for such activities not only must you provide supporting information, but you should be prepared to justify the educational usefulness. This is most easily achieved by preparing a reflective note or statement.

10 Special circumstances

All doctors who hold a licence to practise should remain up to date with the CPD requirements set out by the RCPath. Participants working less than full time have an equal obligation to provide high-quality patient care as those working full time, so their CPD requirements are the same.

From 1 April 2010, in line with the Academy of Medical Royal Colleges (AoMRC), the College has amended its policy regarding the five-year rolling target of 250 credits. The College recognises that in a range of circumstances participation in CPD may also be difficult for periods of time. This should be considered at annual appraisal as part of medical revalidation.

If there is a period of absence from work, it is to be expected that CPD activity should catch up with the expected rolling total, unless a prolonged period of absence had justified a formal ‘return to practice’ review. If such a review occurs and considers how CPD activity should be handled, then its decision should be recorded. If appropriate, that decision might be used to justify a shortfall in CPD points, for example by presentation of the decision at annual appraisal.

The following are some of the circumstances and some of the ways in which these may be addressed:

Participants undergoing remediation

CPD will be an essential part of the remediation process.

Participants who are suspended

This is hopefully rare, and the period of suspension before return to work or a decision on retraining or remediation should be short. Where necessary, it should be possible to make up any necessary CPD credits over a five-year cycle.

Participants who have retired from all clinical practice

If a retired doctor wishes to retain a license to practise, the CPD requirements of the College must be met.

Non-consultant career-grade doctors

Non-consultant career-grade doctors should meet the same CPD requirements as other career-grade doctors in their specialty.

Participants working in isolated environments outside the UK

In some circumstances, the type of CPD activity available may not conform to the quality standards set by the College. You should self-accredit as much CPD as appears justifiable in terms of the learning achieved. Any shortfall should be made up on return to the UK. Periods of absence of more than one year may require specific CPD, as agreed with the doctor's appraiser.

Career breaks

A career break is a period when a doctor, voluntarily, does not require a license to practise. A return-to-work programme may then be required. A national return-to-practice policy is under consideration.

Long-term illness or maternity/paternity leave

Where ill health, sickness leave or maternity/paternity leave prevent participation in the CPD scheme, participants should seek to make up any shortfall in CPD activity over the remainder of the five-year cycle. If this is not possible, it should be discussed at appraisal.

11 Administration of the CPD programme

The CPD scheme is administered by the Professional Standards Department.

Registration of participants

Registration with the CPD scheme is voluntary and requires individuals to complete an online form. All those who are recommended for a Certificate of Completion of Training by the RCPath are notified that they are eligible to register for the CPD scheme.

A letter is sent to new registrants that confirms their registration, clarifies the requirements of the scheme and describes how they may access the online CPD portfolio. Details on how to register are available on the College website.

Non-members of the College may access CPD scheme by applying to become an Affiliate member of the College.