

Perfecting your PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN

A PDP is an essential tool for planning your learning needs and recording your CPD. But where do you start?

Bob Ireland,¹ Richard Cure² and Liz Hopkins³ explain.

What is a PDP?

Now that continuing professional development (CPD) is a requirement for all registered DCPs and certainly both desirable and recommended for dental receptionists and practice managers, it is worth remembering that the purpose of CPD should be to ensure that every member of the dental team is 'fit for purpose'. Unfortunately one of the problems with CPD is that there is a tendency to select it based on either what is most easily and cheaply available or what seems most enjoyable; this is described by educationalists as 'perceived need'. This can mean that we get better at the things we are good at and ignore, and probably get worse at the things we are not so good at or don't really enjoy doing; in other words we ignore our educational or learning needs. The more we ignore CPD in the areas where we don't perform very well, the more we lose confidence in undertaking these activities. This can result in either avoiding these activities all together or doing them badly.

A personal development plan (PDP) is a process by which educational needs are identified, objectives are set in relation to these, educational activities are undertaken to address these learning needs, and finally evidence is produced and recorded to confirm that new knowledge, understanding, or skills have been achieved.

Developing a PDP

In order to undertake this, it is necessary to first ask a number of fundamental questions:

Who should write the PDP?

You can obviously write it yourself, however, you may not be too sure what your learning needs are so the help of a colleague or colleagues is often useful; it can easily be carried out in a relaxed atmosphere over a cup of coffee; it shouldn't be discussed or formulated in snatched conversations between patients! In a well structured practice, you will be undergoing routine appraisal and this is an ideal time for you to discuss a PDP with your appraiser.

How do I identify my learning needs?

You may be well aware of where you are lacking in confidence and knowledge without anyone having to tell you eg you might not understand how to book an appointment using the recently installed practice computer software. Try sitting down for ten minutes and

writing down three things you do badly and three things that you do well. Remember that you are identifying what you need to learn, not necessarily what you want to learn. Learning needs may also be identified from many other sources, such as:

- *Feedback from other members of the dental team* eg your dentist has suggested that it would be helpful if you could learn how to take impressions

¹Honorary Associate Clinical Professor,

²Honorary Associate Clinical Professor & Clinical Director Orthodontics, ³Honorary Associate Clinical Professor & Clinical Director of Orthodontic Therapy, Postgraduate Dental Education Unit, Institute of Clinical Education, Warwick Medical School

*Email: richard.cure@warwick.ac.uk

- *Feedback from patients* eg giving oral health advice to pregnant mothers
- *CPD self assessment* where you have achieved a low score
- *Audit* undertaken within the practice eg this may have identified the need for an improved stock rotation system
- *Educational meetings or training programmes.* You may have attended a course but not really understood much about it
- *Practice meetings.* These can uncover a learning need relating to the practice which could be addressed by several team members eg the impact of the disability act on the development of the practice.

How many learning needs should I include?

It is important not to overload your PDP by attempting to tackle too many issues. Keep it simple; it is better to identify one or at the most two needs only. These can be selected by considering what is either most important for you or for the practice. For example, your dentist may be just starting to provide implants for patients and you will be assisting him/her but don't know anything about what you may be required to do.

How am I going to learn?

You shouldn't forget that it is possible that another member of the dental team could tutor you. If this is not an option, then there are a host of avenues open to you, such as formal courses, journals, books, distance learning, online computer tutorials,

conferences etc. The activity should be focused on your learning needs and should be in a format with which you feel comfortable.

What sort of timescale should I consider?

The timescale needs to be defined but also needs to be realistic ie it needs to be achievable in the timescale you have selected. It may be dictated by the length of a course you have chosen, by the date of a particular forthcoming development in the practice, or simply by the educational time you have available: a maximum of one year is probably a reasonable guide.

How do I know if my PDP is good enough?

It is often useful before you start to discuss your PDP with other members of the team or the person with whom you have had a recent appraisal. You will usually receive useful advice on whether you have chosen the best method of addressing your needs eg maybe there is a better course or training programme for you than the one you have selected. Others may also be able to judge whether what you plan to do can be realistically achieved in the timescale you have set yourself.

What do I do when I have completed my PDP?

Having completed your PDP, it is important that you have it documented. It will always be classed as CPD and if you

are a registered DCP, it may be verifiable in which case an appropriate certificate should be kept in a safe place so that it can be produced for the General Dental Council (GDC) if requested.

When you have completed your PDP it is a time for reflection and an important opportunity to ask yourself a number of questions:

- Did I achieve my learning needs?
- What was easy, what was difficult?
- How am I now going to apply what I have learnt?
- How will what I have learnt help me, the practice, my colleagues, or the patients?
- What is my next learning need?

When you apply what you have learnt it should bring tremendous personal satisfaction and an improvement in your self confidence. It will hopefully also elicit appreciation from both your colleagues and your patients. It should provide you with the motivation and enthusiasm to start thinking about the next educational priority.

Whilst your objective may have been achieved, PDPs are a continuous and ongoing spiral process. Dentistry is not a static profession; there are constant developments in technology, materials, legislation etc and it is easy to become complacent about not updating the areas in which we are starting to lose touch. As you become more confident and more competent you might also start to think about whether you would like to move up one of the many exciting career pathways which are open to you.