

Continuing professional development: a need of time

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Continuing Professional Development (CPD) in medical profession refers to a process of documenting and tracking the knowledge, skills and experience of a doctor which he attains both formally and informally as his work, beyond any initial training¹. To be more precise it is a record of what a doctor experience, learn and then apply in his profession. This term is generally used to maintain a physical folder or portfolio documenting the professional development of a clinician as a professional².

The CPD comprises of varied spectrum of methodologies to learning, like hands on skill sessions, workshops, events and conferences, best practice techniques, e-learning programs and ideas sharing which focused on an individual to improve and to have an effective professional development^{2,3}. The CPD process helps the doctors to manage his own professional development in a broader scale, on regular basis, which helps them to record, review and reflect on their knowledge and skills which they have attained in a specified period. The continuous learning and training increase the capability and confidence and also compliments the career aspirations of an individual. It involves progression from a basic knowledge of know-how to a more mature, advanced or complex understanding of their professional skills, knowledge and transferable skills like patient safety, leadership, managing projects or organizing information^{1,3}. A CPD needs to be a self-directed (not by employer), documented process, focusing on learning from experience, reflective learning and review. It should be helpful to individual to set his objectives and development goals both from formal and informal learning process².

The benefit of Continuing Professional Development is to ensures that both academic qualifications and practical skills should not become obsolete or outdated and give an opportunity to an individuals to 'up skill' or 're-skill' themselves continuously, regardless of their educational level or age. CPD also helps an individual's regularly to emphasis on how they can become a more effective and competent professional³.

The role of CPD or continuous learning is widely accepted in health profession to fulfil their professional requirements for a number of reasons. Most important reason is that technology and biomedical sciences are advancing so rapidly that new devices, drugs and protocols or procedures are being constantly introduced into the practice which requires ongoing acquisition of latest knowledge and skills. Secondly, a good healthcare professional cannot emerge from his initial training in skills like hands on skills, clinical competencies and communication skills, which they need for practice already fully mastered because it is an on-going process⁴.

Keeping in view the above mentioned rationale and to encourage our practitioners and doctors in keeping their knowledge and skills up-to-date, the concept of Continued Medical Education (CME) was introduced in Pakistan by Pakistan Medical and Dental Council (PMDC) in 2014⁵. This was not a new concept, as in developed countries the CME is mandatory for re-certification of qualification and retention of name in regulatory body register or continuation of job since last many years². Similarly the Pakistan Medical and Dental Council (PM&DC) has announced that to re-certify the registration, the physicians need to complete required number CME points and all doctors should present CME certificate for renewal of license to practice⁶. Although this was a wise and long-awaited decision but its abrupt and unplanned implementation created an anxiety among doctors especially the young physicians who were unaware of the CME concept. Moreover, no infrastructure to provide CME were planned or identified and no clear roadmap was given by the PMDC to the institutions and doctors regarding nature of CME expected from them as per their qualification and job description. Doctors working in small setups and from remote areas were in blind alley as how to complete their CME points. Moreover, no facilities for online training were identified or planned by the regulatory body before implementing the decision. Regarding this policy, Pakistan Medical Association (PMA) expressed it serious concerns in their central council meeting. According to press release the PMA specified that the association has no concerns against CME, but having severe concerns over the forced implementation of the CME programme without doing any basic homework and provision of infrastructure⁷.

Considering the difficulties faced by the doctors in completing CME hours, the PMDC temporarily suspended the pre-condition of CME hours for renewal of doctor's registration after few months. PMDC Management Committee Chairperson has announced that new and easier procedures for CME credit and registration renewal would be announced soon. In this context instead of travelling to other cities, the doctors will be provided facilities in their vicinity or online CME training facilities by the PMDC certified trainers. The PMDC management committee hoped that very soon the new move will be helpful in alleviating the undue anxiety in completion of CME that was generated in the medical profession⁵.

In this era, where knowledge and innovations are changing the medical practice at a fast pace, the evidence of continuing professional development is considered an essential aspect for renewal of licence with regulatory body. Unfortunately, since suspension of their decision in 2015, a new policy from PMDC is still awaited. To our perceptions, even no preliminary work, any road map or comprehensive policy is planned to develop infrastructure or capacity building for continued professional training of the doctors. It is suggested that, the implementation of mandatory CPD for recertification of medical professionals in our country is a need of time and has to be addressed at priority by PMDC.

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