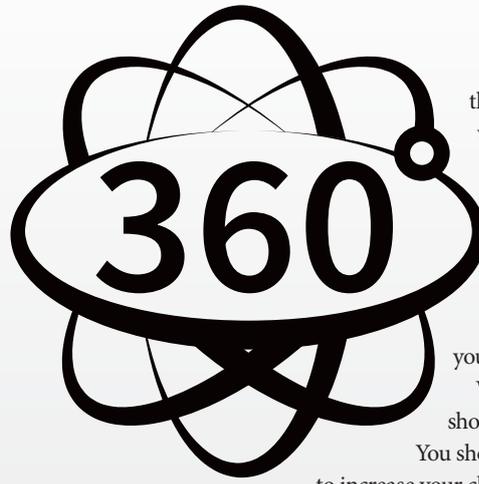


# Becoming a fully rounded professional



they have undertaken, which means again going over what you have done in a thoughtful way. Did you understand it? How is it going to improve the way you work or what you do?

What sort of development should you be looking at?

You should always be striving

to increase your clinical knowledge, even venturing beyond your own discipline. Reading around a subject increases your overall understanding and helps put things into a wider context. If you haven't already done so, join your local dental group, find out what others are doing and learning about. Take an active part in the meetings; perhaps offer to give a presentation.



**Michael R. Young<sup>1</sup>** explains why you should embrace CPD, personal development planning and your hard and soft skills.

## Enhanced CPD

In this article I want to discuss how the new enhanced continuing professional development (CPD) requirements present an opportunity to dental professionals to develop and progress their careers. I will touch on why it is important to not only develop your hard skills, but also your soft skills, how to manage your knowledge, and why keeping your CV up-to-date is important.

As you will no doubt be aware, from January 2018 there were significant changes to the CPD requirements for dentists. From August 2018 these changes also affect other dental care professionals (DCPs). Dentists now have to complete 100 hours of verifiable CPD per five year cycle, whilst dental hygienists, dental therapists, orthodontic therapists and clinical dental technicians will need to undertake a minimum of 75 hours, and dental nurses and dental technicians must do 50 hours over the same five year cycle. The General Dental Council (GDC) has called this 'Enhanced CPD' because *all* of your CPD now has to be verifiable. You will only need to submit verifiable CPD to the GDC, but you may wish to continue with non-verifiable. Verifiable CPD is compulsory,

but from a career point of view it is probably wise to do as much non-verifiable CPD as you can. Under this new regime you are still required to have a personal development plan (PDP).

## Professional development

CPD is defined as 'learning, training or other developmental activities undertaken by a dental professional, who could reasonably be expected to advance his or her professional development as a dental professional, and is relevant to the persons [sic] field of practice' (British Society of Dental Hygiene and Therapy). I hope that you see CPD not as an onerous task but as something that can and should be part of your career development.

Development is not the same as training or education: it is a broad, lifelong process of improving your skills, knowledge and interests as a means of maximising your potential and career prospects. Now is probably a good time to revisit your PDP, freshening it up, setting new goals or even setting a new career pathway. Alongside this you might also want to review your CV.

Start by looking at where you are now in terms of your career, identifying your career goals, and then thinking about the development needs that are going to help you get to where you want to be. Identify your options for learning, which should address your learning style and the resources available both inside and outside the workplace. Finally, once you have set out your PDP, don't forget to monitor your progress and periodically modify it.

## Reflection

As part of the enhanced CPD programme, registrants are expected to reflect on the CPD

## Sharing knowledge

What about development opportunities within the workplace? Clinicians should always be willing to share their knowledge, not just among themselves but with the whole team. Team meetings are a great way of doing this. Beyond the clinical side, what about such things as customer care? Courses like this are usually taken as National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ) and to different levels of competence. These are usually completed in-house and involve compiling a portfolio based on real customer care experiences. They are neither too challenging nor time-consuming, and can help you gain or improve your self-confidence, which is invaluable. Any development that helps you improve your interpersonal skills is certainly worthwhile. Thinking beyond the GDC and their CPD requirements opens up a whole area of development.

## Soft skills

All of my employees were encouraged to take an NVQ in customer care. It made them think more about what looking after people was all about. Another, perhaps not so obvious benefit was that because they did all of the work at work, patients were able to see that the practice was indeed focused on improvement. A win-win situation. So called 'soft skills', which include being an excellent communicator, are the more intangible and non-technical abilities that employers often look for in their employees. They are not like hard skills, the tangible and technical skills that are easily measured by someone's qualifications and specific professional experiences. Soft skills are sometimes referred to as transferable skills or professional skills. They are skills that are less

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specialised, less rooted in specific vocations, and more aligned with the general disposition and personality of a person. Other examples of important soft skills are self-motivation, teamwork and problem solving.

Soft skills relate to your attitudes and your intuitions. As soft skills are less referable to your qualifications and more personality-driven, it is important to consider what your soft skills are and how you might show evidence of them before you apply for a job. This is particularly true of the recruitment process where transferable skills and potential often take precedence over professional experience. Being able to demonstrate your soft skills equates to demonstrating great potential to succeed and progress in the career of your choice. GDC determined CPD will enhance your hard skills; you will enhance your soft skills.

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### Lateral thinking

There are other 'informal' development opportunities that you should consider, and these can form your non-verifiable CPD. You have to think laterally, looking for learning opportunities that are going to improve your career development and progression. For example, a dental nurse who is excellent with adults, but who finds treating and generally dealing with children difficult. How could they improve their skills in this area? They could ask one of the dentists in the practice who is good with children to help them, perhaps in conjunction with reading a book on children's dentistry. If you work near a dental hospital, the same dental nurse could ask permission from the practice to spend time in the children's department as an observer. If done properly, this is an excellent way of learning; it also demonstrates to the dental nurse's employer that they want to be as skilled and competent as possible.

Don't wait to be asked or told to undertake CPD by your employer, be proactive, and tell them what you want to do. At the same time, practice owners and managers should motivate employees who lack ambition or career goals, inspiring them to find drive and ambition. That's what leaders do.

### Evaluation

You should not be a passive consumer of CPD, but rather you should get into the habit of evaluating your training and development, assessing its usefulness and its value in terms of time and money.

Everyone likes to get away from the workplace for a day; to start at 9:30 am instead of 9 am; to just sit and be talked at; and hopefully with a nice lunch thrown in. That's how most people see a training day or course. But someone has had to pay the course fees. Then there's also the lost practice income. The point is, unless you clearly identify what the training and development needs are for you, and the practice, you run the risk of wasting a great deal of time and money, and will in the end be no better off. To avoid this, and before you sign up for *any* course, you must:

- Define what you want any specific training or development to achieve
- Set objectives so you know what is to be achieved
- Make sure that everyone (if you are taking your employees along as well) knows what the objectives are
- Devise a way of comparing results with objectives
- Evaluate the delivery of the training or development.

At the end of most training days or courses delegates are usually given an evaluation sheet to give feedback. You should always provide feedback, positive and negative, but always constructive.

Back at the workplace, all attendees should be asked to discuss any training or courses they have attended at the next practice/team meeting; this way its usefulness can be scrutinised. It is also an opportunity for the rest of the team to pick up any useful points.

Managing your knowledge so that you comply with GDC CPD requirements is easy if you tackle it sensibly and keep on top of it. At the start of each year work out how much CPD you are going to have to do, what you want to do and then when you're going to be able to fit

it in. Not only is there a time element to this, but also there is a financial aspect as well. Set everything out in your PDP.

If your practice is going to continually improve, which it must do if it is not going to lose ground against your competitors, everyone must be prepared to:

- Deepen their knowledge and expertise in areas that interest them
- Broaden their knowledge into areas that perhaps don't interest them as much. Don't ignore areas you don't like.

### Records and your CV

As far as managing the recording of your CPD goes, you can either rely on doing it yourself, or you could subscribe to an online service that not only does this for you, but which can also provide you with the learning material. How you do it is down to you, as long as you do it. Remember that your CPD must be verifiable.

I was at a dental exhibition a couple of years ago when I overheard a dentist ask someone manning a stand of one of the online CPD companies, if he signed up today to an online CPD service could he get five years' CPD credited by the end of the month? No was the answer. Obviously forward planning was not this dentist's forte.

Earlier I mentioned updating your CV as part of your hopefully reinvigorated approach to learning. Your CV is important because it showcases your educational and professional achievements, and career history. It should be informative yet concise, no more than two sides of A4 if possible. You should update it periodically in case you need it at short notice, say, because a career opportunity has suddenly presented itself. Your CV should highlight your skills, not only in your dental role, but also your outside interests and any transferable skills you have picked up along the way. The content, spelling and grammar must be accurate.

The days when you simply walked out of a place of learning with a piece of paper that proclaimed your capabilities, and that was that, are long gone. The modern work place is ultra-competitive and you need to continually upgrade your skills and knowledge, not just so you can move forward, but rather to stop yourself from falling behind. Strive to make yourself a fully-rounded professional with all the hard *and* soft skills that any potential employer would wish for. CPD is not something you can ignore, but rather than seeing it as a threat, something onerous, you should embrace it and use it as a way of developing your career.

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