



PDPs

# Personal Development Plans

## Get a head start on meeting new CPD requirements with a specially designed PDP for your whole team. **Julie Ferry** spoke to personal development tutor Kathryn Marshall.

Having a structured career plan is one of those things that you just never seem to get round to. It is on the to-do list but somewhere in between the stream of patients that come through your door and the never-ending list of phone calls and paperwork, it isn't classified as urgent and therefore keeps on being put to the bottom of the pile. However, with the imminent arrival of compulsory continuing professional development (CPD) for dental care professionals (DCPs), it will become a requirement to give a lot of thought to your training needs. The GDC have agreed that starting from July 2008 DCPs will be required to complete 150 hours of CPD every five years, with 50 hours of that having to be verifiable.

One way of structuring your CPD is to draw up a Personal Development Plan (PDP), which encourages you to analyse where you are now, where you want to be in the future and what skills you will need to get there. PDPs are becoming increasingly popular for the whole dental team and with support from PCTs will be coming soon to a practice near you.

PDPs are already well-established in some areas of the country. For example, Kathryn Marshall is a practice development tutor for Cardiff University and is charged with the job of working with dental practices that would like to create PDPs for each member of the dental team. Kathryn's work began in January and over the past six months she has helped over 20 practices with their educational objectives. A trained dental nurse and practice manager based in Surrey, she now spends half of her working week in Wales.

'I love my job,' she says. 'Knowing that I can really achieve something at each practice I go to is very rewarding.'

Kathryn's main objectives when visiting a practice for the first time are:

- To inform them of the GDC's guidelines on compulsory continuing education for the whole dental team

- To show a method of planning CPD and lifelong learning via the use of a simple PDP
- To help them access the right education at the right time for the right team member.

For some people though this will all seem like a lot of hard work, so does Kathryn believe that PDPs are a realistic tool for practices to implement?

'Absolutely. I'm a glass half-full kind of person and while I realise that it's not going to happen overnight and that there are barriers to it, like time pressures, I think it is really important and ultimately benefits both the patients and team members. Plus dentists are encouraged to determine their CPD needs through PDPs and the team should be no different.'

Kathryn is adamant that using a PDP can be easy and stresses that a practice development tutor won't just come to the practice once and expect you to get on with it.

'I can visit the practice on a regular basis to make sure they are on course with their PDP and help and advise them on the various methods of postgraduate education,' she says. 'I also feed back specific needs to the regional postgraduate tutors so they are kept in the loop too.'

But how do PDPs really make a difference to personal learning?

'We have found with dentists that they tend to pick and choose a bit with their learning and often don't have a fixed plan and we want to encourage a more structured training pathway both for them and now, for the rest of the team. We are saying take a look at what your patients need, look at what the practice needs and then design your education around that.'

The GDC has recently stated the subjects all dentists and DCPs must study for a minimum number of hours in each five-year cycle as verifiable CPD. These subjects are core knowledge areas for all dental professionals [with the exception of dental technicians, who should substitute radiography and radiation protection for materials and equipment].

They are:

- Medical emergencies (at least 10 hours per five-year cycle)
- Disinfection and decontamination (at least five hours per five-year cycle)
- Radiography and radiation protection (at least five hours per five-year cycle).

They are also recommending that all dental professionals who work in a clinical or laboratory environment should carry out CPD (verifiable or general) in:

- Legal and ethical issues
- Complaints handling.

So, now you know what you have to achieve, how can a PDP help you to do that? As a personal development tutor Kathryn will introduce you to a specially devised plan for the whole dental team. Whether you decide to start with infection control or CPR, you can structure your training either individually or as a group around the plan. Kathryn is also keen to point out that if you keep your PDP up-to-date then it can be beneficial when it comes to moving forward with your career.

'Any portfolio that people develop can be taken with them to another practice as they develop their career. So any plan demonstrates not just to themselves but to a third party their record in lifelong learning. It also helps people to focus their thoughts and turn them into achievable goals. They may think that they aren't going anywhere, but by focusing on their personal goals and getting extra training it can open up new doors.'

There are various associations and organisations that are able to help team members with a PDP. Kathryn suggests contacting your local deanery or professional association who should have models that you can use and may have tutors available to come out to the practice. In any case it seems like PDPs are definitely high up on the training agenda – now you just need to find the time to squeeze them in.

*Coming soon in Vital: What is non-verifiable CPD, and how do you approach it?*