Learning the easy way

There are lots of different ways to meet CPD requirements, so you need to choose a course or learning experience that suits you personally. Mike Wanless looks at the choices.

Following the compulsory registration of DCPs on August 1 2008, comes the need for Continuing Professional Development (CPD). The General Dental Council (GDC) has specified that a DCP must undertake 150 hours of CPD in a five-year period. This includes the three core subjects of medical emergencies, disinfection and decontamination and radiography and radiation protection (or materials and equipment for dental technicians).

Meeting your requirements
Some learning activities need to be verifiable (have identified learning objectives, evidence of attendance, quality controls, clear outcomes). Others are described as non-verifiable. There are many ways in which these requirements can be met. CPD can be achieved through: private study, reading journals, peer review, meetings and courses. A full list and further guidance is available on the GDC website: www.gdc-uk.org. Any type of learning activity has a place. As you start this process, it’s worth thinking about what type of learning suits you so that you can find a way of doing it easily and produces the lasting effects.

How to learn
You learn in your individual way. Some people find learning from books easy, while others hate it. You may have found that you find the format of a course helps you learn, but that others feel so uncomfortable they learn very little. There is an expression ‘horses for courses’... so how can you pick a course or other learning experience that suits you? Kolh (1974) described the learning cycle – to learn fully about a subject there are four stages. As well as experiencing something, we need to think about it (reflection), reason why it has happened and consider its application – ‘what do I need to do next time?’

This was developed into separate learning styles by Honey & Mumford (1992). They considered that pragmatists learn best where there is a clear link between the topic and their work. They like the chance to try out and practice techniques under the coaching of a credible expert. They like learning to overcome real problems. They don’t like people from ivory towers spouting endless theory or learning about things that they cannot see themselves using.

Who suits what?
Activists like new experiences from which to learn. They become engrossed in short ‘here and now’ tasks, such as games, competitive tasks or role play. They are happy to be in the limelight, be involved with other people and have a go. They do not like sitting, listening, watching, reading or repetition.

Reflectors like activities that let them watch and/or think. They like time to think and prepare before acting, and to think about it again afterwards. They like to come to their own decision and dislike being put under time pressure. They do not like making snap decisions or responses, or having to make shortcuts.

Theorists learn best from situations where they can see the context and understand the underlying theory. They welcome the chance to question and throw assumptions and logic. They enjoy being intellectually stretched and analysing data. They learn least when thrown into doing something without knowing how or why they are to do it. They dislike having to share their emotions and feelings, or make judgements without thorough knowledge. They also dislike superficial coverage or gimmicks.

When you decide how best to approach your CPD, think about how you learn best. Decide whether self-directed learning or any other method is right for you. You may as well learn easily rather than in a way you find difficult.

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