

The lowdown on the new CPD system

A randomly selected audit by the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA) will be conducted twice a year to check if health care practitioners are complying with the new Continuing Professional Education (CPD) system.

This will eventually mean that every practitioner is audited at least once every 5 years.

This is how the long-awaited new HPCSA CPD system, piloted from July to December last year (2005) by medical technologists, optometrists and optical dispensers, will be enforced.

The new system will probably kick in for doctors and dentists in May or June 2006.

An evaluation report of the initial pilot programme was being compiled by the HPCSA at the time of writing and was due to be submitted to the HPCSA Exco in February and its Council in April this year.

Get set for January 2007

According to Mrs Barbara van Stade, the HPCSA's Senior Manager, CPD, Registrations and Records, the compulsory system will kick in across the remaining professional health care boards 'by the latest in January 2007', although boards that had continued with CPD (either on a compulsory or voluntary basis) would be able to start with the new system from May or June 2006. She stressed that members were legally expected to continue adhering to the old system until this date.

Penalties for blatant non-compliance could include practice under supervision, suspension or being struck from the register, depending on the gravity of the offence.

The new programme incorporates a number of major shifts from the old, with one added bonus – that every health care professional will get a bonus of 30 Continuing Education Units (CEUs) from the outset.

Other shifts include allowing for a hierarchy of CPD activities, 'viewed from a developmental perspective', with learning structures in three levels of activity. The first is non-measurable outcomes (i.e. conferences), the second is measurable outcomes such as an interactive skills workshop with an evaluation of the outcome (or journal articles with evaluation), and the third centres on activities associated with formally structured learning programmes like postgraduate degrees and diplomas.

CEUs to fit your own needs

Practitioners may obtain all their CEUs in one level or a number of CEUs across different levels, depending on personal circumstances and individual learning needs. CPD committee co-ordinator for the HPCSA, Helena da Silva, asked practitioners not to submit their portfolios but to retain them for submission when their names were drawn in the random sample audit.

All CPD points or CEUs accrued from 2004 onwards will be to the credit of the health care professional for 2 years from their date of accrual. The number of points to be collected per annum was 30 across all those professions following compulsory programmes (e.g. medical and dental) and will be valid for 2 years. The purpose of this was to reach and maintain a level of 60 CEUs at all times (and this may be in any level).

In recognition of participation in the current system and in the interests of equity, every practitioner would receive a starting balance of 30 credits, effective from the implementation date of the new system.

Uniformity at last

Da Silva explained that boards such as Emergency Care, Dental Therapy and Oral Hygiene had never had CPD, while the Speech Therapy and Audiology Board and the Psychology Board had put their CPD programmes on 'indefinite hold' in 2004 until gremlins in the new system were ironed out. She said the HPCSA had already appointed additional staff to meet the new demands of the incremental random compliance audit.

The new CPD Guidelines were built on a 'foundation of trust'. She added that her organisation believed that health professionals were committed to meeting the requirements for continued education because they believed they and their patients would reap the benefits of ongoing learning and personal and professional development.

The full draft guidelines are available on the website www.hpcsa.co.za and the CPD helpdesk can be reached at (012) 338-9413, (012) 338-9442 or (012) 338-9392.

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