

CPD FOR TECHNICIANS

— *the approach of one trust to supporting its staff*

By TESS FENN

Registration of pharmacy technicians brings with it the requirement to complete continuing professional development (CPD). The first of two articles on this topic outlines the approach taken by one pharmacy department to support CPD for its technicians

Undertaking and recording continuing professional development (CPD) for pharmacy technicians is acquiring a higher profile as technicians take on extended roles and we move towards registration and regulation. The Department of Health's 2002 discussion paper "Pharmacy workforce in the new NHS"¹ indicates that the role of the technician is pivotal to the delivery of modern hospital pharmacy services. It also recognises, to ensure they are fit for practice, that pharmacy technicians need to participate in CPD programmes.

Within the hospital sector, clinical governance and the NHS modernisation process of "Agenda for change"² and the Knowledge and Skills Framework (KSF)³ are continuing to add more emphasis to this. The KSF, which is a development tool, requires that every NHS post, including those of pharmacy technicians, have a set of knowledge and skills requirements that the post holder will apply, to achieve the expectations of their job. Annual development reviews will identify individual staff members' development needs, both those essential for the job role and for personal development. Therefore, it easily can be seen that CPD is integral to this process.

At Guy's and St Thomas' (GSTT), CPD has been promoted and facilitated within the pharmacy department since 2000, led by the pharmacy Education and Development Unit (EDU). It has facilitated CPD using the same strategy for all staff members, eg, assistant technical officers, pharmacists and pharmacy technicians. However, this article will specifically refer to pharmacy technicians.

The pharmacy department's CPD strategy aims to provide opportunities for all pharmacy technicians to actively engage in and undertake their own CPD with support and encouragement from their line managers. This

is achieved in a variety of ways, including the following:

- EDU induction for all new members of staff
- CPD facilitations conducted by approved CPD facilitators
- CPD record incorporated into study leave approval form
- Planned CPD activities within the department

INDUCTION FOR NEW STAFF

All pharmacy technicians new to GSTT, as part of their induction, have a meeting booked with a member of the EDU team to discuss their development needs and the learning opportunities that are available to them. CPD is included in this and an initial CPD meeting with a facilitator is planned. This induction discussion, as documented in the induction pack, comments on the benefits and need for CPD. It also explores different ways of learning and how pharmacy technicians can support their own CPD. This is seen as an important part of the discussion, as learning and CPD are not just about attending study days or undertaking a qualification — the list of activities is endless (see Panel 1, p302). Pharmacy technicians are also given information on how they may access many self-directed learning resources, such as the new learning resource available from the Centre for Pharmacy Postgraduate Education (CPPE) www.cppe.man.ac.uk/technicians.

Pharmacy technicians are also encouraged and supported to participate in the London Pharmacy Education and Training (LPE&T) Technician Self Development (TSD) programme, facilitated by EDU through various departmental competency training and assessment packs. The TSD programme is a valuable tool in supporting CPD and aims to provide a more structured approach to a pharmacy technician's career progression. As a flexible learning pack, it can easily be undertaken in the normal working environment at the pharmacy technician's own pace and is self-directed.

CPD FACILITATION MEETINGS

The take up of CPD is increased if support is given through CPD facilitation meetings.⁴ Reflecting this, all members of the EDU team and several other pharmacy staff are CPD facilitators and pharmacy technicians are actively encouraged to book one-to-one facilitation meetings. The content of the facilitation meeting is determined by the pharmacy technician's needs but generally focuses on:

- Describing the CPD cycle, process and benefits
- Reviewing different styles of portfolios and recording paperwork available, including (LPE&T) portfolio and recording template, the Association of Pharmacy Technicians UK portfolio and the Royal Pharmaceutical Society's "Plan and record"
- "Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats (SWOT)" analysis, identifying own strengths and weakness and training needs
- Writing a personal development plan
- Identifying possible CPD entry opportunities (scheduled or unscheduled events)
- Review of written CPD entries, identifying learning opportunities and improving practice
- Encouraging reflective practice and supporting reflective writing

The content of the portfolio review session is confidential at all times, unless evidence suggests that any member of staff has acted outside the trust code of conduct, or that any individual has acted outside their professional code of conduct.

Based on the premise that CPD is a personal learning activity to improve one's own practice, the CPD strategy indicates that CPD facilitators should not be managerially responsible for the pharmacy technicians whose portfolio they facilitate. This is also to ensure that the pharmacy technicians can discuss any CPD significant events or entries openly and without fear of reprisal.

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Panel 1: Different ways of undertaking CPD

- Work shadowing
- Induction programmes
- Self-directed learning programmes
- "Learning by doing" experience
- Reading articles and journals
- Searching the internet
- Attending formal and informal meetings
- Delivering presentations
- Distance learning
- Professional membership information
- Research and audit
- Teaching
- Tutoring
- Workshops
- Talking to colleagues

The sessions between CPD facilitators and pharmacy technicians are documented on a CPD facilitation form recording the date, time, venue, name of CPD facilitator and general comments surrounding the session. This is signed by all parties and becomes a valid record that can be shown to the pharmacy technician's line manager as evidence that CPD is being undertaken. This ensures that the content of the pharmacy technician's portfolio and CPD entries remain confidential.

Details of CPD facilitation meetings, however, are kept on a database, which is password protected, and accessed only by the EDU team, as this data is needed to inform the department's annual CPD activity audit.

In order to assure the quality of the facilitation meetings conducted all GSTT pharmacy facilitators attend the LPE&T CPD facilitator's course and are supported by experienced CPD facilitators when undertaking initial CPD facilitation meetings.

Prospective CPD facilitators, who will ultimately act as role models for undertaking CPD, are required to provide evidence of maintaining their own portfolio, have their own CPD facilitator, provide evidence of their own appraisal skills, be able to commit time to undertaking facilitation meetings and have support from their manager. In addition, facilitators attend in-house quarterly CPD networking meetings that provide an opportunity for sharing experiences and peer reviewing anonymous CPD entries. This provides a valuable forum to ensure consistency within approaches to undertaking CPD facilitation meetings.

STUDY LEAVE APPROVAL

All pharmacy technicians wishing to attend a learning event/study day, etc apply for approval by completing short course

study leave forms. EDU guidelines for study leave application asks pharmacy technicians to consider the following questions:

- Is it appropriate for you to attend?
- Is it appropriate for your department or the trust?
- Does it fit in with objectives that have been agreed with your line manager at your appraisal?
- How does it fit in with your CPD?
- What will this study day enable you to do better/improve upon in your role?
- What knowledge will you gain from this that you can share with your colleagues?

The study leave application form also requests that a feedback session has been arranged with line managers, so that any useful information from the learning event/ study day can be shared and passed on to colleagues, team or the department. By sharing the experiences/knowledge from the study day it can be of benefit to those that may not have had an opportunity to go or help towards the betterment of others within the team. This may also provide an additional learning opportunity for the pharmacy technician, supporting the development of their presentation skills.

The study leave application form also indicates that a completed CPD record form is submitted to support the leave request. The CPD record form is separated into two sections. Section one is submitted with study leave requests and covers the first three stages of the CPD cycle: identification of training needs, planning and resources, and action. Line managers are requested to sign this form and this ensures that the relevance of the learning event has been discussed and that it is linked with the pharmacy technician's appraisal objectives and personal development plan. Study leave will not be approved by the EDU unless this is completed fully.

Section two of the CPD record form records the review or evaluation of the learning event and is sent to pharmacy technician by the EDU four to six weeks after the date of the learning event. Pharmacy technicians complete this and discuss the evaluation with their line manager and return a copy of the completed form to be retained in their training records. By including the CPD record form as a mandatory requirement for study leave approval this automatically ensures that pharmacy technicians are reflecting on their training needs and recording scheduled CPD events. These forms can be kept in their CPD portfolio as CPD entries.

DEPARTMENT CPD ACTIVITIES

There are many planned learning activities delivered throughout the pharmacy department, some aimed at all staff and others specifically at pharmacy technicians.

There are regular weekly drug lunches provided on both sites of the trust and weekly

clinical meetings primarily for pharmacists, but technicians are welcome to attend.

Specifically for pharmacy technicians there is a provision for weekly lunchtime meetings, where pharmacy technicians can share their experiences and new information on medicines, updates in working practice or their job role. For example, this is often used as a forum for sharing new dispensing protocols for clinical trials or for giving feedback to peers from various conferences attended.

Senior pharmacy technicians meet quarterly for an afternoon developmental session, supported by the EDU. The focus is often on current topics such as "Agenda for change", KSF, registration, and provides a valuable forum for the sharing of ideas and information aimed at their own CPD needs.

Other activities also run throughout the year, previously timetabled through an annual CPD programme to support the implementation and recording of CPD. CPD facilitators run early morning workshops as a drop in session for all pharmacy technicians needing support, encouragement or motivation. These are run as group sessions and provide a valuable forum for sharing ideas and learning opportunities. At GSTT, we aim to promote CPD at every opportunity.

SUMMARY

Providing a CPD framework integrated into the normal work pattern and all learning events helps to support all pharmacy technicians to participate in the ongoing, cyclical process of reflection and self-directed learning. We also aim to encourage and empower pharmacy technicians to prepare them for future roles, not just in a clinical setting but also within the entire scope of pharmacy practice. Motivating and encouraging pharmacy technicians to engage in their own personal development supports the whole pharmacy team in providing a quality pharmaceutical service and care that our patients deserve.

REFERENCES

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3. Department of Health. The NHS Knowledge and Skills Framework (NHS KSF) and development review guidance — a working draft. London: Department of Health; 2003.
4. Brackley K, Evans D, Haria M, Gifford A, John C, Ashton C. Developing CPD in the workplace: the implementation of a regional support strategy. The Pharmaceutical Journal 2002; 268:726-8.