

Unit Four

Personal and professional development of health care assistants from a PCT's perspective

Key messages

Reading this unit will:

- *help you to understand the benefits of an effective personal development and appraisal process*
- *help you to identify the potential contribution that PCTs can make to supporting practices*
- *provide you with templates and resources developed and used by others.*

What is personal and professional development?

Personal and professional development is a continual process of evaluating learning needs and planning learning to meet those needs. This is underpinned by a system of regular appraisal to review progress and plan future actions. Documenting this process in a personal development plan (PDP) helps the employee and the practice to prioritise and monitor the development process, and to take appropriate action to support the individual.

Health care assistants (HCAs) can benefit from a positive culture of personal and professional development by keeping a PDP to support the development and expansion of their role.

The benefits to the practice of PDPs

Improving the skills of the practice workforce benefits the practice, the patients and the NHS. PDPs are essential for demonstrating clinical governance and are an integral part of the risk-management strategy for the practice. PDPs:

- *demonstrate best practice in action*
- *show that the practice is meeting learning and development needs in a cost-effective way*
- *help staff to realise their potential – thereby helping with recruitment and retention.*

Staff feel appreciated when they are given the opportunities and encouragement needed to follow their PDP. They are also more likely to remain employed in the organisation. The implementation of learning action plans following the review of a PDP should ultimately result in improvements in patient care. General practices, in turn, will have a greater chance of reaching quality and outcomes framework (QOF) targets, and will employ resources efficiently by using the skill mix of their staff effectively. Practices will also be able to plan for the future retention and hiring of staff.

PCTs have an important role to play in encouraging and supporting general practices to put in place effective systems of personal development and appraisal.

The key supporting roles that PCTs can play are to:

- *articulate local needs and assess future demand to help practices prioritise their PDPs*
- *support practices to implement PDPs and undertake appraisal by providing information and training*
- *use data collected from appraisals to commission training and undertake workforce planning*
- *provide dedicated support, particularly around NVQ training and assessment, for practices and HCAs.*

Articulating local needs and assessing future demand

In order to ensure the effective development of HCAs, it is essential that:

- *PCT board members and staff are asked about the developmental needs of HCAs*
- *the impact of national and local policies is considered*
- *the availability of education and training is assessed*
- *the availability of funding is secured.*

Dedicated funding is essential to meet the expanding requirements for learning and development to cover the whole workforce, including HCAs. Identifying and obtaining funding must be linked to a requirement for practices to show evidence that PDPs have been used systematically. PDPs are used as part of the process of determining the developmental needs of the staff and services required for patients, as well as meeting clinical governance requirements.

Consider how you will relate the education and training resources and activities in your PCT with the health needs of your local population

- *Undertake a health-needs assessment; seek the advice of those in public health and the local government, and from the general public.*
- *Produce a coherent plan that embraces general medical practices, other independent contractors, non-health organisations and the general population.*
- *Map out workforce numbers as a whole and per practice. Consider whether you have the right balance or if changes should be made. You should look at the relevance of the skill mix, not just at the costs of the workforce.*

Supporting practices to implement PDPs and undertake appraisals

The drivers for healthcare organisations are focused on performance and, in particular, the performance of general practices. The operational performance of the PCT is measured by:

- *the recruitment and retention of skilled staff*
- *the ability to maintain skill and knowledge bases*
- *the efficient performance of staff and other resources.*

The effectiveness of such organisational mechanisms rests on the capability, competence and motivation of the workforce to deliver against pre-determined performance objectives. Regular appraisal is the most effective mechanism an organisation can deploy to focus the workforce on its objectives.

The PCT needs to fund support for practices to:

1. *introduce PDPs*
2. *implement reviews and undertake appraisals*
3. *promote appraisals and use sanctions against those who would ignore them.*

As a key element of a performance-management strategy, organisations need to display genuine commitment to the appraisal process. The commitment usually manifests itself in expectations that everyone will undergo an annual appraisal, and the information gathered relating to training and educational needs will be used to design and commission training for the following year. PCTs need to take this a stage further by using the information to feed into their corporate and strategy planning, thereby shaping future services, redesigning roles and reconfiguring services.

Information and training

The PCT should provide **information** and **training** to ensure that both appraisers and staff understand what is expected, and that they have the skills and understanding to make it an effective process. There are two key ways in which information relating to appraisals can be shared – through websites and via published material.

Set up a website

Set up a website that can be used to formulate the collection of data for the PDP and structure the way in which it is recorded.

Published material

Draw on published material such as that in [Tool – Sources of useful information](#).

It is usual in NHS organisations for appraisal to be seen as an integral part of a line manager's role. However, it is naive to assume that all line managers have the right knowledge, skills and competence required to conduct appraisals. The skills required are often viewed as generic communication skills, but there are complex dynamics at play when an individual's ability to do his/her job well is under scrutiny.

Appraisal training should include:

Regular updates

Competence checks

Regular occurrences

Delivering effective appraisals

There are three key factors in delivering effective appraisals:

1. *giving and receiving constructive feedback*

(See **Tool – Giving feedback constructively – as a reviewer or an appraiser**)

2. *setting performance goals*
3. *motivating people.*

If an organisation is to gain any benefit from conducting appraisals, it needs to invest in the skills and competences that make it an effective process.

- **Tool – Being an effective appraiser: preparing well** will help you set the vision for what an effective appraiser and appraisal process is like.
- **Tool – Evaluation tool to measure the effectiveness of appraiser facilitation of a PDP** and **Tool – Self-check of communication knowledge and skills as an appraiser** will enable appraisers to evaluate their performance.

As a PCT, you could commission, provide or signpost training for appraisers employed in general practice or by other independent contractors who are unable to perform appraisals well.

Even when an appraisal scheme has been in operation for a while, PCTs need to have a monitoring process in place to quality assure appraisal interviews and to ensure that the appraisal process is supporting the application of learning in practice. It also allows organisations to measure the impact of their investment in education and training on organisational performance.

Using data collected from appraisals

Anonymised data collected through the appraisal process can influence:

- *the commissioning of education and training across the PCT*
- *the competence levels of managers*
- *the skill mix of the workforce*
- *change-management programmes*
- *corporate planning (financial, workforce and service delivery matters).*

Providing dedicated support

It is essential that the support needs of practices are assessed. At a basic level, help to enable general practices to ensure that all staff are able to produce a PDP may be needed, as well as training for review and appraisal. As practices become more skilful, support may be needed to move them onto the *Knowledge and Skills Framework*², and *Agenda for Change*.³ It is important to plan how to allocate resources fairly to various disciplines, clinicians and managers, and self-employed and employed or attached staff. The plan should also include how to support facilitators and tutors. Additional resources could be sought, for example, from NVQ centres. Many areas have found that an HCA forum or group helps HCAs to exchange information and provide support for each other. Funding a facilitator can make the HCA forum even more effective.

Example: Developing a training programme for HCAs to become clinical supervisors

Southwark PCT has developed a training programme for HCAs to become clinical supervisors and provide clinical supervision for other HCAs working in Southwark. At present, each HCA is mentored and supported in the practice by a named practice nurse within the practice that they work.

NVQ-trained assessors from the QUAYS Assessment Centre in Lewisham visit, support and assess HCAs in primary care.

Example: Encouraging practice nurses to undertake the Assessor's Award

Richmond and Twickenham PCT has encouraged all practice nurses to undertake the Assessor's Award or to provide comprehensive witness testimony for other practice nurses undertaking the award. Where the practice does not have a qualified assessor, one is provided from the relevant accredited centre. This may be a qualified member of the learning and development team or an externally qualified practice nurse. The Access project lead monitors workplace assessment.

Encourage and enable practices to formulate and execute practice development plans that include priority areas for HCAs.

Example: Funding an NVQ coordinator post

Richmond and Twickenham PCT has secured funds from the South West London Confederation Projects Fund for an NVQ coordinator post. This has enabled the PCT to develop an NVQ infrastructure to provide a framework for ongoing personal development for all non-professional workers.

Devise ways to inform and engage practices about the priorities for the district and their populations. This can be through:

- *practical support provided by supplying information about morbidity and mortality data, and the needs of their population*
- *enhancing IT capability and capacity to make reliable and accurate data available and accessible for efficient teamworking and communication*
- *passing on national documents and directives in such a way as to be useful to the everyday work of practices.*

Ensure that mechanisms are in place to support the standards for HCAs and that you will be able to advise practices on performance issues (see [Unit 4: Personal and professional development of HCAs from a general practice employer's perspective](#)).

Example: Support practices in advertising and interviewing candidates

Richmond and Twickenham PCT provides support to practices in respect of advertising and interviewing candidates. The advisers are available to give any education, training or management advice in respect of HCAs and make regular visits to practices in a supportive role.

Summary

- *Personal and professional development is a continual process of evaluating learning needs and planning learning to meet those needs.*
- *PCTs have an important role to play in encouraging and supporting general practices to put in place effective systems of personal development and appraisal.*
- *The key supporting roles that PCTs can play are:*
 - *articulating local needs and assessing future demand to help practices prioritise their PDPs*
 - *supporting practices to implement PDPs and appraisal by providing information and training*
 - *using data collected from appraisals to commission training and undertake workforce planning*
 - *provide dedicated support, particularly around NVQ training and assessment for practices and HCAs.*

References

1. Chambers R, Tavabie A, Mohanna K, Wakley G. *The Good Appraisal Toolkit for Primary Care*. Oxford: Radcliffe Publishing; 2004.
2. Department of Health. *The NHS Knowledge and Skills Framework*. London: Department of Health; 2004. http://www.dh.gov.uk/PublicationAndStatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidanceArticle/fs/en?CONTENT_ID=4090843&chk=dyrb/a.
3. Royal College of Nursing (RCN). *Agenda for Change*. RCN website: <http://www.rcn.org.uk/agendaforchange/>.