

Learning-needs assessment

Identifying your learning needs for your continuing professional development

Stage 1. Making your overall learning plan

Here you need to be completely honest with yourself:

- *identify your weaknesses in knowledge, skills or attitudes*
- *specify topics for learning as a result of changes in your role, responsibilities or organisation*
- *link into the learning needs of others in your practice*
- *tie-in with the service development priorities of your practice, the primary care trust (PCT) or the NHS as a whole*
- *describe how you identified your learning needs*
- *prioritise and set your learning needs and associated goals*
- *justify your selection of learning goals*
- *describe how you will achieve your goals and over what time period*
- *describe how you will evaluate your learning outcomes.*

The more time you invest in planning your programme of learning, the more likely it is that you will focus your learning effectively. You will then spend the precious time you have learning about topics that are relevant for your job, and the needs of your practice.

Your personal development plan (PDP) will evaluate your progress so far and what your future needs are. Your learning plan is essential for your PDP to take place. You should also organise all the evidence for your learning into a portfolio, to provide evidence of continuing professional development (CPD) as stated by the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) in the post-registration education and practice (PREP) document. It also provides evidence of continued development to use for job interviews in the future. It is up to you how you keep this record of your learning up-to-date. Some examples include either a learning log, as discussed previously, or a simple A4 file with plastic wallets in which to build up a systematic record of your educational activities in line with your learning plan.

Stage 2. Using a range of methods to identify your learning needs

- *Where are you now?*
- *What are your roles and responsibilities?*
- *What do you need to know?*
- *What knowledge, skills and attitudes do you need?*

Your learning needs will encompass the context in which you work, as well as your knowledge and skills, in relation to any particular role or responsibility of your current post. The extent of learning you need to undertake will depend on your level of responsibility for a particular role or task; depending on your level of responsibility, you may either delegate or contribute. Your learning needs will be different if you work in an inner-city practice compared with a rural practice, or if your practice population has a high proportion of minority groups, such as immigrants, the homeless or people with certain special needs.

Your learning should take into account your aspirations for the future in terms of your personal or career development, or improvements in the way you deliver care in your practice. Several methods should be used to identify your learning needs. Identifying your own gaps in knowledge, skills or attributes can be particularly difficult and therefore it may be useful to ask colleagues or friends for their opinions. Patients who use your services may also want to comment on the way you operate or provide service.

Determine your learning needs by:

- *asking patients, users and non-users about your service*
- *comparing your performance against best practice*
- *comparing your performance against objectives in business plans or national directives*
- *asking colleagues from different disciplines about shortfalls in how your work interfaces with theirs.*

Stage 3. Creating your goal

Think of it as a car journey from A to B. You need to identify B before you start your journey to decide on the best route. Before you leave A, you should plan how you are going to get to B, otherwise you are likely to get lost, side-tracked or go round in circles and potentially never arrive at B. Look back at your aspirations that you set in the previous stage. Each of these is a target destination. You now have to decide the route there. Changing performance and improving quality can be difficult and education is the key to this. Initial enthusiasms can soon become stuck in the daily chores of work. Computer-operated reminders or even notes in diaries are helpful to keep you on track.

Stage 4. Setting priorities for what and how you learn

Some of the needs in your learning plan will be appropriate for the present circumstances, some will be too costly and others too time-consuming. Go through again and select those that have clear aims and objectives, and are achievable within the time and money constraints that you have upon you. Then rank them in the order of priority. You need to set a time span for this activity.

Reference

1. Wakley G, Chambers R, Field S. *Continuing Professional Development in Primary Care: Making it Happen*. London: Radcliffe Medical Press Ltd; 2000.