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CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF DENTISTS IN THE EUROPEAN UNION - UPDATE

// INTRODUCTION

The main objective of the Council of European Dentists (CED), which represents over 340,000 dentists across Europe, is to promote high standards in dentistry and oral healthcare for European citizens.

Directive 2005/36/EC lays down minimum training requirements which shall equip the graduating dentist with the necessary competences to start practicing dentistry. This should, however, only represent the first stage of an individual's career. From graduation, professionals should undertake continuing professional development (CPD) throughout their career. The acquired experience, knowledge and skills will enable every dentist to practice high quality dentistry, ensuring the highest standards of patient safety, whilst managing traditional as well as new challenges in oral health.

Continuing professional development (CPD) of dentists is defined as a continued structured learning for dental practitioners, aimed to maintain, update or enhance knowledge, technical skills or professional clinical or behavioural standards and competences, all of which can improve the provision of oral healthcare to the public.

Engaging in CPD is a professional obligation of every European dentist, in order to be in line with the dental code of ethics of the CED. “[...] *must assure the quality of patient care by updating his or her professional knowledge and skills throughout his or her entire professional life*” (CED Code of ethics for dentists in the European Union, adopted during the CED General Meeting on 26 May 2017).

In the latest version of the Professional Qualifications Directive, there is a provision stating that: *Member States shall, ensure that professionals are able to update their knowledge, skills and competences, by encouraging continuous professional development, in order to maintain a safe and effective practice and keep abreast of professional developments.*¹

Due to different health systems delivering oral healthcare across the European Union, CPD is organised very differently in each Member State and can be obtained in different settings by different providers.

The diversity of the continuing education activities on offer and the principle of free choice for practitioners should be maintained in line with the policy of each Member State. There is no evidence that one CPD structure is preferable to another, as illustrated by the co-existence of mandatory and voluntary systems for a specific profession in several countries.

Therefore, the scope of this document is not to standardize or harmonize the CPD process within Europe but rather to provide some general principles applicable in mandatory and voluntary settings that can be used as a tool for dentists and CPD providers as a basis and a model for their own programme development.

// OBJECTIVES OF CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The CPD of dentists must contribute to the maintenance and enhancement of the dental practitioner's oral health knowledge, skills and competences with the objective of ensuring and continually improving the delivery of high-quality care to patients. Regular continuing education is thus of high importance for quality assurance and for patient safety. In order to safeguard adequate delivery of oral healthcare and appropriate relationships with patients, the members of the entire dental team must have the appropriate education, training and regularly enhance and update their knowledge, skills and competences to provide high quality oral care interventions as delegated by the dentist.

¹ Article 22, point B of [the Professional Qualifications Directive](#) (Directive 2005/36/EC as amended in 2013/55/EU)

CPD does not have to be complex but should focus on the knowledge, skills and competencies necessary for the daily practice of the dentist, adapted to recent developments in dental and general health and taking into account public health circumstances.

Continuing professional development of dentists should:

- meet the individual requirements of the practitioner, fulfil the personal demands for continuing education and deepen medical and dental knowledge, skills and competences;
- take into consideration the need for awareness of constant, continuing developments in dentistry and epidemiology of oral health;
- maintain and develop modern quality-orientated and evidence-based oral healthcare for patients;
- address the increased need for the development of digital skills and eHealth, among healthcare professionals;
- maintain and update the skills for the leadership of the dental team;
- maintain and develop knowledge around practice management, law and ethics, and environmental issues;
- maintain and develop knowledge, skills and competences in regard to public health threats.

// PROVIDERS AND GUIDANCE FOR DELIVERING CPD

CPD is training acquired after graduation and the national dental association of each country should have a prominent role in organizing CPD in collaboration with academic institutions, health authorities, scientific or professional societies and health educators.

As CPD should address emerging health needs and be relevant to the health, the CED believes that all Member States should continue to have their own specific rules for CPD based on the principles of proportionality and subsidiarity (Revised CED Resolution on Annex V.3/5.3.1 of Directive 2005/36/EC (PQD), adopted during the CED General Meeting in November 2020).

Any conflicting interests of CPD providers should be declared and any scientific basis of the activity presented should be in line with the code of ethics and not be distorted by commercial considerations. Embedded advertising and direct commercial links are inappropriate within the educational content and should be avoided. The lecturers must disclose to participants any monetary or other special interest they may have with any company whose products are discussed in the course. Disclosure must be made in promotional material and in the presentation itself.

// TYPE AND CONTENT OF CPD ACTIVITIES

The type of CPD activities through which dentists can improve and broaden their knowledge, skills and competences are many and various, for instance courses and lectures, distance learning, conferences, workshops, webinars as well as self-directed activities like writing journal articles and book reviews, preparing and presenting lectures and courses etc.

CPD should be closely related to core activities and professional needs, covering clinical and non-clinical aspects and associated skills such as e-skills, ICT and Communication. Each dental practitioner chooses CPD activities on the basis of their content, **clinical/scientific or other professional activities** and his or her personal development plan which is formulated according to the dentist's professional needs and interests.

Clinical or scientific activities are those related to the scientific, clinical or technical aspects of oral healthcare, including public health, prevention, oral cancer early detection etc., or medical aspects related to oral care, activities such as infection control, antimicrobial resistance (AMR), medical emergencies, radiography, radiation protection, digital tools and all equipment which contributes to patient safety.

Other professional activities are those that are indirectly related to dental practice/care. These include courses about office practice management, environmental, legal and ethical issues.

Interdisciplinary health activities are those promoting the collaboration between health professionals and need for integrated care, CPD activities for interdisciplinary teams, and interprofessional collaboration, such as the concept of “one health”, should be encouraged.

// METHODS FOR CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

As there are so many different methods of teaching and learning, it is necessary to offer different types of continuing education. Structures and methods for continuing development are, for example:

- a) Formal structures of continuing education (e.g., congresses, symposia, meetings, workshops, classes, colloquia, demonstrations, practical hands-on exercises);
- b) Clinical continuing education (e.g., rounds (home and ward rounds), training and work in dental practices, presentation and discussion of specific cases);
- c) Continuing education together with colleagues, such as quality circles or study groups (task forces) and peer review;
- d) Specific curricula (e.g., a structured continuous professional development, additional courses of education);
- e) Continuing professional self-development via different media (e.g. professional and technical press and literature, audio-visual educational means);
- f) Electronic and online means such as webinars, e-learning and other digital tools.

// QUALITY ASSURANCE OF CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT COURSES

CPD of dentists is an important instrument of quality improvement and promotion, and, therefore, a regular individual evaluation is absolutely necessary. This is possible if the actors such as national dental associations and other providers support the quality assurance of dental education by formulating guidelines and recommendations, by strengthening the self-evaluation of organisers of continuing education and of their participants and by adapting to potential disruptions, e.g., pandemics, by building suitable infrastructures for online teaching to enable appropriate quality of online education. The key criteria underlying the qualitative evaluation of any continuing professional development course should be:

a) Educational objectives

The educational objectives must express specific learning outcomes that are intended for participants through the educational program proposed.

b) Organization and logistics of the activity

The human and material resources necessary to carry out the educational program must be in line with the internal coherence of the program itself and its characteristics. During webinars and other forms of online courses, the quality of the digital platforms and digital tools must be safeguarded.

c) Relevance

The appropriateness of the educational activity to meet the training needs of the group to which the activity is directed must be accomplished. Such training needs have to be identified through a valid and reliable system in a particular group to which the educational activity will be directed.

d) Qualified Trainers

Trainers must have a relevant scientific experience and qualification to the topic, as well as appropriate digital skills.

e) Teaching methodology

In order to enhance the teaching/learning, the didactic resources used in the educational activity must take into account the objectives, the content and the type of delivery, the number of participants to whom the activity is directed, among other characteristics.

// EVALUATION OF THE EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITY

Participants should be given an opportunity to evaluate all CPD activities, to provide feedback to the CPD providers and trainers, as well as to the accreditation body of CPD activities. Moreover, participants should be able to rate the digital platforms and digital tools used during CPD activities.

Questionnaires for this purpose should allow participants to rate the learning outcomes of the CPD event with regard to achievement of the educational objectives, content coverage and extent of knowledge imparted, usefulness and relevance of the information provided, skills of the presenter, human and material resources, suitability of the venue or the virtual platform.

Participants should also be able to give any further comments on the event and provide suggestions for future CPD activities. In order to satisfy the needs and interest of the individual health professional, collected data needs to be efficiently processed by the CPD provider for planning new CPD programmes.

// QUANTIFICATION OF CPD

As a matter of professional obligation and ethics every dentist should collect a minimum amount of CPD credits during a defined period based on the educational activities attended. A CPD credit must be based on the content and duration of the educational activities.

Dental practitioners are responsible for developing their personal educational plan according to their needs, collecting the required CPD credits and providing evidence and documentation of participation in the different learning activities.

Mutual cross-border recognition of formal CPD needs to be well established. The EU must ensure that available resources and efforts at European level are employed to facilitate the exchange of information and best practice. CPD online courses can be implemented whenever possible and adequate.

// ACCESS TO CPD

The importance of CPD for health professionals should be promoted and recognised by competent authorities, employers and by any actor involved in health care provision.

CPD that is relevant to daily professional practice is likely to strengthen the motivation of the professional to undertake CPD and enhance the impact of CPD on healthcare provision. The choice of CPD activities should be based on learning plans of the individual professional, whilst also recognising the importance of certain core subjects e.g., cross infection control, law and ethics, clinical governance, and the need for diversity of learning.

Time and/or resources available to leave the workplace, cost, practicability, overall effectiveness and impact on the profession and on service provision, are crucial factors determining professionals' access to and engagement in CPD. Support should be made available to professionals and employers if it is necessary to attend the CPD course.

// CED RECOMMENDS

- In order to maintain and develop the knowledge, skills and competences, each professional has the responsibility to undertake the appropriate CPD.
- National dental associations should actively promote and organise CPD structures and activities, either in-person or online.
- CPD activities should fulfil the minimum requirements set out in this Resolution.
- Each professional should have the opportunity to undertake CPD, supported by appropriate structures.
- Each professional should develop and regularly update his/her skills by obtaining reliable, evidence-based knowledge through CPD.

Given the relevance of CPD for the quality of daily practice, further research at European level on the impact of CPD activities on patients and patient safety should be undertaken.

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