

EUROPEAN REGION OF THE  
WORLD CONFEDERATION  
FOR PHYSICAL THERAPY



INFORMATIVE PAPER WITH  
RECOMMENDATIONS ON  
CONTINUOUS  
PROFESSIONAL  
DEVELOPMENT

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**Informative paper with recommendations on Continuous Professional Development**

**European Region of the  
World Confederation for Physical Therapy (WCPT)**

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## **Introduction:**

This recommendation for development of programmes for Continuing Professional Development (CPD) in physiotherapy and for future re-certification/re-registration is part of the ER-WCPT Education Policy (7.) and should be seen in the light of the Bologna Declaration and its goals as well as the following documents:

- Declaration of Principle and Position Statement on Education, WCPT 2003. (1.)
- Report on Post-Basic Physiotherapy Education, ER-WCPT 2000. (2.)
- European Physiotherapy Benchmark Statement, ER-WCPT 2003. (5.)
- Recommendation on Specialisation, ER-WCPT 2004. (8.)

In the context of lifelong care in Europe with advances in skills and knowledge, it is imperative that all physiotherapists become active participants in the development of knowledge and practice. The demand from consumers, service providers and educators for highly-skilled healthcare professionals who can respond to and influence changing needs and practice demands has occurred within a context of radical change in health care delivery across Europe. These radical changes include drives to improve efficiency and quality while containing rising costs.

The demand for quality, accountability and efficacy of practice has highlighted the need for health professionals to demonstrate that they are keeping abreast of new knowledge, techniques and developments related to their professions. Professionals must also be able to contribute to the provision of best practice and the development of the health professions.

The profile of CPD has risen substantially across the professions in all sectors of employment in recent years. The need for physiotherapists to maintain and update their knowledge and skills is now seen as essential for achieving and maintaining quality in service provision, and is in keeping with a broader recognition that lifelong learning, embracing both formal and informal post-basic education, is an ongoing requirement for all physiotherapists.

As a profession, physiotherapy has always been engaged in continuing professional development. Implicit in this is the assumption that physiotherapists will maintain, develop and enhance competence through CPD. However it is no longer enough that members should simply undertake CPD. As physiotherapists are expected to be responsible for their own development, they must be far more systematic and efficient in regard to this activity. For the physiotherapist to be able to show evidence of professional learning, development and impact on practice, it is no longer a question of whether systematic CPD should take place at the physiotherapy work place but how the CPD should take place.

In some countries development of competences may have a formal value in relation to promotion, job change and salary; this needs to be documented. It could be through creating a presentation- or learning portfolio. It is, however, important that the individual workplace develops a model for documentation matching the areas of achievement and the culture for clinical reflection.

Systematic planning, evaluation and keeping a portfolio may ultimately serve as preparation of evidence for re-certification/re-registration. In order for the individual physiotherapist/ the individual work place to structure their activities of informal as well as formal learning it is important to relate to a common guide or framework. For this reason some countries have developed national guidelines or frameworks for systematic CPD, and some Member Organisations have developed a portfolio guide to CPD in physiotherapy.

The development of national guidelines or frameworks for CPD systems in Physiotherapy serve as material for this Recommendation. The framework for the Creation of Successful Systems of CPD in Physiotherapy Services from the Chartered Society of Physiotherapy, CSP (12.) has influenced the work, as well as the electronic service guide to systematic CPD developed by Association of

Danish Physiotherapists (15). The organisation-based development of systematic CPD developed by Koninklijk Nederlands Genootschap Voor Fysiotherapie (K.N.G.F.), Norwegian Physiotherapist Association (NFF), and Swedish Association of Registered Physical Therapists (LSR) (16, 17, and 18) has also been followed and are described as examples for inspiration in this material.

### **Definitions of CPD as part of Life Long Learning:**

#### **What is CPD\***

The term, Continuing Professional Development (CPD) is used to describe the process to maintain, develop and enhance skills, knowledge and competence in order to improve performance at work. The essential CPD principles are:

- The individual learner is responsible for managing and undertaking CPD activity and the effective learner knows best what he/she needs to learn
- The learning process is continuous in a systematic cycle of analysis, action and review
- Learning objectives should be clear and should serve organisational needs and patient needs as well as individual goals
- The process is planned and based on identifiable outcomes of learning that the individual achieves

CPD encompasses a wide range of learning activity, formal, informal and incidental learning. CPD can range from study days to develop skills and knowledge in particular areas of physiotherapy to longer programmes of study that lead to an academic award. Other activities, for example, in-service education programmes, reading, journal clubs, „shadowing“ and clinical supervision systems are valuable opportunities for learning. Contact with colleagues and other professionals can result in incidental learning. The informal and incidental learning can be formalised through reflection, evaluation and recording in a portfolio.

CPD should constitute a balance between formal, structured learning on the one hand and unplanned learning in the workplace on the other. The emphasis should be on self-directed learning and learning outcomes rather on quantitative input, e.g. Number of hours.

#### **CPD and Life Long Learning:**

CPD is the lifelong learning in which physiotherapists and assistants engage in the context of their working lives. Society at large changes rapidly and keeping abreast requires individuals to learn and develop constantly. Learning takes place as part of day-to-day life and is a lifelong activity.

*\* from: **Continuing Professional Development (CPD) Briefing and Policy Statement, CSP 2003** (10.)*

## **Procedures for formal and informal learning in CPD:**

### **Suggestions for Member Organisations to undertake**

A Member Organisation can develop its own national guide to structure CPD, according to local appraisal.

CPD is the lifelong learning which takes place as a part of day-to-day life and work, and is a lifelong activity in a variety of settings and systems. This process calls for systematic procedures.

The purpose for a Member Organisation (MO) to develop a guide/ framework model should be to encourage physiotherapists as well as employers to consider a structure for CPD.

- **Guide/ framework for systematic CPD:**

A guide/ framework serve as a reference for the individual physiotherapist and his/her work place to structure CPD activities in informal as well as formal learning.

A framework outlines the outcomes of activities that

- ***Maintain, develop and enhance skills, knowledge and competence in order to improve performance at work***
- are the results of systematic reflection and planning
- are documented in the individual CPD-programme

- **Description of competence**

A guide/ framework to CPD should contain description, definition, levels and development of competence, based on consensus obtained institutionally at MO-level.

Competence cannot be viewed detached from the clinical practise where it is developed or maintained. CPD-descriptions of competence often have an outcome-based approach as opposed to an input-focused description of qualifications, and focus on the values, experience, knowledge and skills that match the requirements set for the person in a given job situation.

In focusing on development of competence related to the job and organisation, the traditional understanding of development through attending courses is widened to include the many possibilities for development of competence within the work place, such as work place learning.

Competence description for a physiotherapist may include competencies in various aspects of professional practice, often described as clinical practice competence, learning competence, pedagogic competence, organisational and administrative competence, social and cooperative competence, and personal competence

- **Assessing outcomes**

A guide/ framework should also show ways to assess the achievements of the individual physiotherapists while assessing how well the workplace is creating a supportive environment for CPD, laid out as a simple act of assessment against the outcomes outlined in the framework.

To recognise the outcomes of CPD, all learning activities undertaken in a given period of time, in a variety of settings and at any level of credit, must be reviewed. The review must supply information for compiling evidence of CPD, a requirement for statutory re-registration in the foreseeable future.

It is vitally important that managers and staff work together to ensure that learning and development is appropriately undertaken and assessed for its effectiveness. To this end, a process of CPD needs to be pursued that involves:

- The identification of learning needs by the learner (and, where appropriate, their manager)
- The establishment of a number of anticipated learning outcomes, wherein the learners state in clear terms what they expect to be able to do, in a very practical sense, when that learning need is met
- The identification of an appropriate learning activity that will meet the need by satisfying the specified outcomes; and
- The evaluation and systematic recording of learning activities in relation to learning outcomes using a portfolio.

- **Keeping a professional portfolio**

A portfolio enables the physiotherapist to review learning outcomes at different levels within the education process, informal as well as formal, including workplace learning, employment competence, and formal qualification for accreditation using for example the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) in addition to the individual Diploma Supplement.

A portfolio may be a folder, a ring binder, a diskette, an electronic database or something else. In this the individual may collect documentation for work of professional development, create a comprehensive view of the process of learning, a “learning portfolio”, or choose relevant parts of this in a “presentation portfolio”.

A portfolio documents the development process and serves as a tool for self evaluation for the individual physiotherapist.

- It collects the personal learning diary and written evaluation from course participation, workshops, study visits, job rotations.
- It collects minutes from interviews, job- or salary negotiations
- As it describes and contains activities and outcomes, a portfolio is a way to document or present competences.

A portfolio is a tool for systematic and structured planning and evaluation of his/her learning and reviewing the impact on his/her practice. Keeping a professional portfolio is characterised by several points of educational significance:

- It allows the physiotherapists to analyse their learning, especially the learning that they might have derived from their experience of day to day practice (this is often referred to as informal, situated or experiential learning)
- It encourages the physiotherapist to reflect on personal learning as well as on the linking of professional development to personal outcomes
- It allows the practitioner to realise limitations as well as competencies, that is to say, it assists in the identification of outstanding or future learning needs, and allows one to plan for them to be met

- **Services from the Member Organisations.**

MOs may also provide services and resources in supporting work places and members in the development of CPD to structure, develop, evaluate and record their learning and development.

One of these services could be to develop material to inspire and give ideas to create a structure and portfolio model relevant to their practice. It should also allow individuals to create a systematic and more structured approach to CPD as it enables them to plan and evaluate their learning, and review the impact on their practice.

Examples of material/ tools which Member Organisations could describe/make available:

- Guide/framework to systematic work place learning
- Guidance on learning activity
- Personal development plans
- Internal presentation from an expert colleague
- Partnership
- Mentor arrangement
- Networking
- Clinical supervision
- Systematic Clinical reflection
- Team building
- Workshops on CPD
- Literature searching
- Guidance on the development of CPD programmes

The Member Organisations also have signed the Core Standards of Physiotherapy Practice of the ER-WCPT (3, 6,) guiding the development of professional education. This could also be a help starting the CPD program.

- Standard 19: The physiotherapist assesses his/her learning needs
- Standard 20: The physiotherapist plans his/her CPD/LLL
- Standard 21: The CPD/LLL plan is implemented
- Standard 22: The physiotherapist evaluates the benefit of their CPD/LLL
- Audit Tool for use with the Core Standards of physiotherapy practise (4.)

- **Inspiration material from other Member Organisations:**

Chartered Society of Physiotherapists:

A portfolio guide has been developed by the CSP Portfolio Development Advisory Group. The guide includes practical suggestions, ideas, questionnaires, pro-forms and examples

The CSP has developed a guide to help establish and develop a learning portfolio. It is presented on a CD-Rom and as a printed version. It gives suggestions, ideas, questions and examples to facilitate development of the portfolio. The CSP has also developed a Framework for the Creation of Successful Systems of CPD in Physiotherapy Services. (10, 11, 12, 13, 14)

Association of Danish Physiotherapists:

An electronic guidebook has been developed for members and workplaces to start or continue systematic CPD. It contains descriptions of professional and CPD development and gives a variety of possibilities to create local systematic work. It also provides a large number of links regarding CPD-material from organisations, authorities, others. In Danish (15)

Royal Dutch Society for Physical Therapy:

CPD is integrated in quality registration in the Netherlands. To ensure re-registration physiotherapists are required to obtain 120 accreditation points in 5 years by taking courses that are accredited by KNGF. Also, mandatory courses can be assigned for specific topics. The current mandatory course concerns Direct Access. Accreditation points can also be obtained by other activities e.g. audits. Physiotherapists have access to a personal page on the website of KNGF which shows their current portfolio based on accredited activities. (17.)

Norwegian Physiotherapist Association:

CPD is under preparation in Norway. A system for CPD will be presented to the NFF General Meeting for discussion. The proposed system will include different stages. The first stage will be an electronic guide developed for members. It contains descriptions of continuing professional development with a variety of examples. The physiotherapists will have access to a personal page on the website of NFF. The second stage will be a quality registration system. (16)

Swedish Association of Registered Physical Therapists:

In Sweden an organisational change is underway. The Swedish Association of Registered Physical Therapists (LSR) has had a strong focus on the academic development of the profession. This development has been successful and questions regarding clinical competence and evidence based practice are now given high priority within the organisation. One examples of an activity initiated in line with this is a programme for the development of clinical guidelines. Yet another example is that researchers in physiotherapy are invited to write clinically relevant review articles. These are being published monthly in the LSR's magazine Fysioterapi, as well as on the website. (18)



**CPD from Employers' point of view:**

Individual learners and employing organisations must recognise that learning and development can be derived from an extremely wide and diverse range of both formal and informal activities, both in and out of the workplace.

While the individual is responsible for the management of their own learning and development, employers (at both developmental and organisational level) need to create optimal environments for CPD. This is particularly the case when one considers issues such as protected time and the funding of activities.

**CPD in relation to specialisation:**

The qualification of a physiotherapy specialist will include a process for testing or acknowledging the appropriate advanced theoretical and clinical knowledge and skills for the speciality. It is expected that the formal as well as informal process will be fully documented by the applicant. Part of this documentation could be provided through systematic evaluation of outcomes such as keeping a portfolio. The focus on learning might differ as individuals progress through their careers and the settings in which they work. Different specialisation models need responsibility from each physiotherapist to follow the rules. (8.)

**CPD and Higher Education Institutions (HEI) and other agencies:**

CPD as part of Life Long Learning is not just about post-basic qualifications; it is about bringing learning closer to the learner through activities that engage with local communities and employers. This requires HEIs to recognise prior formal and non-formal and informal learning to allow access to programmes and to provide exemptions within programmes. The use of the Diploma Supplement and ECTS can be used alongside skills and knowledge portfolios and individual learning pathways to provide access to the first or second degree tiers or other higher degree programmes of study.

**from: Haug, G Tauch, C (2001) Trends in Learning Structures in Higher Education II Helsinki, (Bologna secretariat website) (9.)**

### **Final Recommendation to the Member Organisations**

In the context of protecting the public, physiotherapy has a professional responsibility to make sure that the best available practice is offered to the patients. Creating systems of CPD in physiotherapy services is an important step in this direction. Physiotherapists across Europe must take an active part in developing CPD careers and profession.

To fulfil this goal the ER-WCPT recommends that MOs undertake the following:

1. Investigation of the needs/demands among members for developing outcome-based CPD systems and for keeping professional portfolios
2. Investigation with the employers of physiotherapists the possibilities and needs for providing learning environments for structured CPD systems
3. The MOs should develop, or consider developing, their own informative national material to structure CPD or to adopt a framework developed in other MOs
4. While establishing a formal system for specialisation the MOs should recognise the need for systematic evaluation of CPD as documentation of formal and informal education
5. MOs may also provide services and resources to help members structure, develop, evaluate and record their learning and development, supporting CPD
6. MO's should emphasise that the Higher Education Institutions should develop CPD programmes with merit and access to higher education. Lifelong Learning opportunities should be equitable and based on documented evidence of formal and informal learning

**The ER-WCPT Working Group on Education,  
Nina Holten, Regina Jetzinger, Grahame Pope, 2004 - 2006**

### **Recommendation for future activity for the ER-WCPT, 2006-2008**

Production of a questionnaire on CPD activities within the ER-WCPT to

- Gather information on CPD activities within the Member Organisations
- Monitor the development of re-registration in the Member Organisations

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