

Continuing Professional Development *vs* Continuing Education

Health service professionals, including health-care teaching staff, need clear reference points to motivate them and give them confidence in the area of professional development. This can only be achieved by creating new models capable of promoting individual autonomy and responsibility while at the same time safeguarding public health. Continuing Professional Development (CPD) is one such model; its aim is to help professionals make personal progress while adapting to scientific and technological change. Individual CPD should be integrated into the training continuum in order to guarantee the coherence of health education objectives and teaching methods at all stages, from the beginning of medical studies to professional activity.

Individual CPD could be defined as the process by which professionals maintain and improve their level of competence. It should be applied to the work of health care teachers in the areas of teaching, research, administration, and – if applicable – medical care, and bring about an improvement in all of these professional activities. It consists of a way of working actively for improvement maintained by professionals throughout their career, and involves searching for excellent practice in the areas of knowledge, skills, abilities and attitudes. Continuing Medical Education (CME), on the other hand, is the sum total of training activities carried out by professionals during their career, after obtaining the general or specialised diploma that qualifies them to practice their profession. The aim of CME is to maintain and improve individual professional competence and it is certainly something all professionals should do.

The individual CPD system is gaining strength in various countries in Europe and America. Its immediate aim is to involve professionals in a given area – in this case teaching – and give them an incentive, so as to pro-

vide professionals with better training possibilities and, in the long-term, improve the health service.

Individual CPD includes all new measures designed to maintain and improve the competence of professionals throughout their career by adapting to the needs of the health teaching system and of the employing organisations. It therefore constitutes a step forward from the traditional concept of inservice training, which has a more limited scope and is less orientated towards improving the quality of the health service and involving professionals in their own organisations. The main aims of individual CPD are i) to maintain and improve individual professional competence, ii) to guarantee the quality of professional practice, iii) to provide recognition for individual effort in maintaining competence, and iv) to provide recognition for individual ability to adapt to changing needs.

Educación Médica Internacional is aware of the difficulties faced by teaching staff in carrying out CME activities that contribute to individual CPD and has decided to create a section in the magazine for this purpose. The section will contain a distance-learning activity that consists of reading and evaluating a series of articles that will appear in the magazine at three-monthly intervals during the year 2006. Professionals who complete a questionnaire evaluating the articles and send it to the distance tutors will receive a diploma confirming satisfactory completion of the activity. In addition, this activity has been awarded with credits by the Spanish CME system. We are convinced that the new section of the magazine will make a contribution to the individual CPD of teaching staff and that this new approach will smooth the path of health science teachers through CME and individual CPD.

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