

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****18 FEBRUARY 2010****AXIA INTERACTIVE MEDIA'S BESPOKE CPDnow SOLUTION FEATURES IN THE NEW LOOK EDITION OF 'OPTOMETRY IN PRACTICE'**

The College of Optometrists has recently launched a new-look journal for their members, featuring an extensive overview of the bespoke CPD work with AXIA Interactive Media, which provided a bespoke CPD solution for the College. The full text of the article follows, reproduced with kind permission of the author:



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Optometry in Practice 2010: Volume 11, Issue 1

This edition of Optometry in Practice marks the start of a new continuing education and training (CET) cycle, but it is also the beginning of a new phase for the journal, supporting the College's continuing professional development (CPD) scheme.

What is CPD and why has the College of Optometrists developed this voluntary CPD scheme? In addition to collecting CET points, optometrists are now being offered the opportunity and encouragement to go beyond CET and engage in CPD activities, and to record this online.

The College has launched CPD Online in advance of any new regulatory requirement for optometrists to demonstrate the impact of learning on their practice. Why? Is it because the College is looking ahead to revalidation and putting its members in the best place to respond to any regulatory environment? Or is the College suggesting to optometrists that this is the sort of activity they should be doing anyway and helping them to do so? The answer is yes to both.

The challenge in engaging the profession in CPD is how to make CPD attractive. How do you move it from something that has to be done, located in amongst those other unwanted annual tasks like filling in your tax return or completing your annual appraisal, to an activity which is enjoyable to work through because it reflects your own personal journey and development?

What is CPD and what does it offer to the individual optometrist? CPD is a system whereby individuals maintain, improve and broaden their knowledge and skills, and develop personal qualities. As health professionals, optometrists have an obligation to develop and maintain their professional competence to ensure that they provide high standards of care to their patients. Any learning activity which can be demonstrated as improving professional knowledge could qualify as CPD.

The College has developed CPD Online over the last year, with the assistance of a working group comprising representatives from all areas of optometric practice, including joint practice owners, independents, newly qualifieds, those in education, advisors, locums and other employed optometrists. The wider community of optical bodies was also represented on the working group, including the General Optical Council.

Over a 6-month period the CPD working group defined what constituted CPD activity and what evidence could be used, and developed a framework on which the CPD system could be based. Axia Interactive Media was appointed as the software supplier in February 2009, and following an intensive period of development a pilot scheme was run in August/September 2009 with the system going live on 23 November 2009.

Why has the College developed CPD Online? The College is the professional, scientific and examining body for optometry in the UK, working for the public benefit. One of the roles of the College is to promote professional development, not only amongst its members but also in the wider optometric community. Developing a voluntary online CPD scheme was partly about future-proofing the profession against potential requirements for revalidation, and also recognising and encouraging individual professional development beyond that currently required for re-registration. At the same time a professional CPD scheme helps to raise public confidence in the standards of optometric care offered to patients.

How does CPD differ from CET and are they connected in any way? CET is mandatory for re-registration, and is run by the optometric regulator, the General Optical Council. CET counts points through CETOptics for courses and learning undertaken (input-based CPD). CPD Online is a voluntary scheme run by the College which encourages the continued advancement of knowledge, skills and expertise to develop and improve standards of professional practice and patient care in optometry. It does not count points, but rather recognises both formal and informal development, providing a place for optometrists to record such activity and also to reflect on how this learning has had an impact on them and their practice as health professionals (output-based CPD).

However, CET is part of an individual's learning and development and CPD encompasses CET. To ensure that optometrists do not have to enter the same information twice, CPD Online allows users to transfer CET activity from CETOptics into their CPD Online record, with no duplication of effort. This happens at the click of a button and all CET transferred across automatically appears as individual learning activities in a user's CPD Online record.

Why should optometrists engage in CPD? Undertaking CPD allows optometric health professionals to keep up to date, build confidence in new situations, learn new skills above the entry-level standards of CET, record their achievements, reflect on how their learning has had an impact on their personal and professional development, gather evidence for revalidation, improve standards of patient care and be ready for change.

CPD covers all areas of optometrists' professional life as well as those activities in their personal life which might affect them as professionals. These include clinical skills, enhanced services and specialist practice, communicating with patients, working with colleagues, leadership and management, education and training, research, commercial matters, external professional commitments and voluntary/community work.

CPD Online provides a system for recording and evidencing the CPD of individual optometrists. It offers a variety of helpful facilities such as monitoring the different types of learning with which a user engages, making it easy to identify where there might be gaps, e.g. too much distance learning versus no peer review/discussion. Such information may be required in future as part of revalidation where an optometrist may have to give evidence of a reasonable spread of learning types.

Output-based CPD is CPD in its broadest sense. It recognises any activity, however informal or for whatever duration, which can be demonstrated as improving professional practice and knowledge. This includes self-directed learning, professional activity, work-based learning, formal events and discussions with colleagues.

Output-based learning is where users reflect on the outcomes of their learning, asking themselves the following questions: What did I get from the learning experience? What was its value to my work? What actions do I need to take as a result of the learning? What further learning might I need?

Writing a reflection of learning proves the impact of that learning on an individual's practice and own personal development. CPD Online offers the user the facility to record such reflection and to link it to one or more CPD and/or CET learning activities.

CPD Online also provides the facility for users to define their scope of practice. Indications are that revalidation may be explicitly linked to an individual's regular practice. The CPD scheme allows users to define not only their current scope of practice but also the scope of practice to which they aspire in the future. This is a simple exercise which is undertaken against a CPD framework, developed with regard to the everyday activities undertaken by optometrists in fulfilling their various roles. This enables users to adopt a more focused approach to their learning as it easily shows those areas where development is needed and enables users to draw up a development plan outlining the learning which is required, how that is to be achieved, and by when. Users can then be assured that their learning plans are realistic. The system will track users' progress over the period of their development plan, alerting them when they are running out of time.

A helpful component of CPD Online is the Resources facility. In this section users can find information and guidance on all areas of the CPD framework, as well as a listing of CPD opportunities offered by the main optometric training providers, with direct links to their websites. This area of the site is still being populated, but will also contain information on wider CPD opportunities. Within the next year users will be able to search for CPD opportunities by location, subject and provider and easily download the details of a listed course into their CPD record. The resources section includes a link to the College library and to the NHS Evidence Library (Eyes and Vision), as well as guidance on types of learning, models of reflection and career case studies, amongst others.

Additionally, CPD Online will allow individual users to maintain their CV. Optometrists can enter a variety of information regarding their background, experience, qualifications, professional development (drawing from their entries in CPD Online where required) and career history, which is then stored to be used at a later date when users can choose which aspects to include to allow the production of a CV for a variety of different purposes. All information held in CPD Online belongs to the individual user. Users may grant third-party access to their CPD record (including those records transferred across from CETOptics) at their own discretion, through electronic invitation. Such access could be to predetermined parts of their record or to all parts of their CPD record as defined by the user.

The College may access users' CPD records for the purposes of collecting general management information. Such statistics and information would always be anonymous. There will be no intervention by the College in any user's CPD record nor will the College make any judgements on individual records unless invited to do so by the user. Users' CPD records will be held in the College system and will move with them regardless of which employer they are working with. Data received in CPD Online will be stored in perpetuity, to ensure that users have a complete record of all CPD (and transferred CET) undertaken during the lifetime of their professional practice.

One of the requests from members when the College was developing the system was that it should be simple enough to use during a 10-minute break between appointments. Whilst we cannot guarantee that you will be able to do this when you are using the system for the first time, it is certainly feasible thereafter. The system allows partly completed records to be saved, with the opportunity to go back again and again to edit that record until you are satisfied. And it is simply a 30-second click of a button to download your accepted CET automatically from CETOptics, and this then becomes a completed activity in your CPD Online record.

Discussions with major employers have been ongoing over the last few months, including corporate bodies, regional chains and domiciliary companies, with a view to adopting the CPD scheme as part of their ongoing performance review systems. There has been a high level of interest, particularly regarding the flexibility of the scheme and the possibility of adding employer-specific competencies to the framework. The College and Axia are working to ensure that as many optometrists as possible have the opportunity to engage with the CPD system through their normal employment processes. Discussions are also ongoing with the Departments of Health in the four home countries regarding the new CPD scheme.

It is fair to state that this sort of development would not have been taking place 20 years ago, perhaps not even 10 years ago, such is the pace of technological change. Optometrists were continuously developing their skills and knowledge then but it is the notion of capturing this on a computer that would have been a totally strange one. It would have been a brave individual who stood up in a room and suggested that a computer was not just a source of documents and knowledge but something that could promote professional development.

It is perhaps worth reflecting on not just what we use computers for but how we use them, especially when connected to the internet. The majority of us now take a connection to the internet for granted. Technology has changed behaviours for many. The internet is so pervasive that if the worldwide web suddenly crashed and disappeared significant adjustments would be required in personal behaviours.

In deciding to adopt the online approach, the College is following the trend of a number of other professional bodies for whom best practice in CPD has determined that engagement in courses/distance learning is of itself not enough (input-based CPD). There is a need to demonstrate the impact of that learning on professional practice (output-based CPD). The Institute of Continuing Professional Development, in its commissioned research project *Regulating Competencies: Is CPD Working?*, found that, although many professions use a combination of both the input and output systems, they are increasingly turning to the more effective output systems.

In the future, given the pace of technological change and innovation in information technology, the notion of a paper-based system, whether for CPD or performance appraisals, is likely to be seen as both ineffective and inefficient. CPD Online offers many possibilities for optometric users, both now and in the future – far more than any paper-based system could provide.

CPD Online is free to College members. Non-members of the College can try out the system for free for a period of 3 months, after which an annual fee will be applied. CPD Online can be found via the College website (<http://www.college-optometrists.org/>), where you should click on the CPD Online logo at the right-hand side of the page. Further information can be obtained by emailing cpdonline@college-optometrists.org

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