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Implementation of Continuing Professional Development for Health Professionals in Nepal

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Continuing Medical Education (CME) is the educational activities that serve to maintain, develop, or increase the knowledge, skills, and professional performance and relationships a physician uses to provide services for patients, the public, or the profession. Typically, Continuing Professional Development (CPD), or Continuing Physician Professional Development (CPPD) includes all activities that doctors undertake, formally and informally, including CME, in order to maintain, update, develop, and enhance their knowledge, skills, and attitudes in response to the needs of their patients.¹

In other words, continuing professional development is any learning outside of undergraduate or postgraduate training or education that helps us maintain and improve our performance. CPD mainly encompasses self-directed and practice-based learning activities in addition to supervised education or training. CPD designates the period of education and training of doctors or health care providers commencing after completion of both basic and postgraduate medical education, thereafter extending throughout each one's professional life.² The value and importance of CME and CPD are self-evident to every doctors and health care providers. CME-CPD actually starts early on in our career but the actual importance of CME-CPD is most relevant after specialization which may be years long in a doctor's life.

WHAT ARE THE FUNDAMENTALS OF CPD?

CPD can be taken as a professional obligation for every professional, and is also a prerequisite for improving the quality of health care and service. CPD is a moral and ethical obligation to doctors.³ CPD activities are essentially learning activities usually of shorter duration, undertaken to maintain professional quality. CPD is taken to maintain and develop knowledge, attitude and skill of individual doctors so as to meet the changing needs of patients and the health care delivery system, adapt the new medical developments, maintain professionalism

and meet the requirements of licensing councils. CPD should be a non-promotional learning activity certified for credit prior to the activity (not retrospectively) by an organization authorized by the credit system owner. CPDs should be accredited, accessible, kept separate, independent from commercial interests and non-promotional. All CPD the materials must be free of any form of advertising and any form of bias.

CPD ACCREDITATION AND ACCREDITING BODY

When selecting CPD activities, health professionals should be certain that credit is being awarded by an accredited CPD provider. The respective accrediting body or councils should also accredit the providers. They have to apply for the accreditation. Credit point is awarded based on each hour of participation. The speaker or the presenter should get higher credits. The event must be presented in a manner suitable for an international audience and events provided by the pharma and medical equipment industries should not be considered for accreditation. It is ethical responsibility of providers or the participants to only claim CPD credits on the basis of their actual participation in any CPD activity. Credit should only be given for those sessions, he/she attended if there are parallel session.

CPD ORGANIZATION AND METHODS

The major responsibility for the organization of CPD is with medical associations, societies, academia and other professional organizations in many countries. The initiators, promoters and providers of CPD include primarily the professional associations and organizations, medical/dental scientific societies, medical/dental schools/universities, postgraduate institutes, employers and health authorities. However, CPD provision must be transparent, well-structured and free from conflict of interests. However, the CPD providers must be developing and/or presenting a scientifically valid and

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effective CME program without a commercial interest on a regular and recurring basis. Innovative distance learning practices, in addition to traditional in-person participation, are increasingly influencing the provision of CPD by using e-learning, blended learning, etc.

According to American Medical Association, the medical profession must establish systems to monitor and document engagement in CPD activities systematically and transparently and it should ensure that documentation of CPD activities acknowledges actual learning and is based on enhancement of competencies, not mere participation in CPD activities.⁴ A valid system of CPD assessment and realistic documentation is very essential for the successful of implementation of CPD.

CME-CPD IN NEPAL

Nepal Medical Council (NMC), in pursuance of its responsibility to protect the health of the people served by the practitioners licensed by it to practice, has made it essential that all the medical and dental practitioners continue to develop their professional knowledge and skills.^{5,6} Similarly, CPD in different Health Sciences is also very essential for quality health care. With ever increasing importance of CPD, Nepal Health Research Council (NHRC) in consultation and cooperation with stakeholders like Nepal Medical Association (NMA), professional societies, academia and health ministry; has also come up with the establishment of a system of accreditation of CPD credits for health-related research activities in 2017.⁷

Some form of continuing professional development was always there in Nepal. However, it was unstructured and optional. Nepal Medical Council has made it formal now and proposed renewal of the medical license or re-licensure every five years primarily based on CPD credits/points earned or accumulated in last five years and now it has begun the process of the amendment of the NMC act. It is proposed that a minimum of 100 credit points should be accumulated in five years for renewal of medical license to practice medicine in Nepal.

Health profession associations are also active in imparting CME to their members. Nick Simon's Institute also did some ground works but it was limited. NMA on request of NMC has started the formal CME accreditation program in 2014, then NHRC started it on research related topics, and recently NMC has started formal CPD programs for all doctors who are registered permanently and the authors have received an opportunity to work with all the teams, starting from conception, planning and implementation of CPD in Nepal.

Trustworthy authorities should be established country-wise to oversee the application of the global CPD standards.² Therefore, NMC in Nepal is the authority that has taken up the responsibility to implement CPD system/activity for doctors for quality improvement.⁶

NMC has gone one step further and has already started trainings to develop master trainers for some essential CPD courses which are mandatory for all medical/dental doctors. Mandatory course curriculum contents were developed with the help respective experts and trainings started. In addition, NMC as a national accreditation institution plans to accredit professional associations, universities and academia, hospitals and related institutions' as CPD providers. Software dedicated to CPD program is also developed to establish systems to monitor and document engagement in CPD activities systematically and transparently. This is now functional at NMC CPD Unit. Guidelines and checklists are developed.

In developing the CPD program of Nepal Medical Council, NMC appointed advisors, coordinator and members, and a panel of experts were involved. The drafts of the standards documents were discussed frequently and the comments received nationally and internationally were taken into account. After broad international/national endorsement, training of trainers was started for provision and development of CPD. The first cycle of mandatory trainings has been completed in 2019.

Allied health providers in the team also need make themselves abreast with recent advances and be up to date so that comprehensive quality health care is delivered to the people. It is high time that the allied health professionals who are involved delivering in health care also have the renewal of their licenses from the respective councils based on CPD credentials. Medical associations, professional councils, medical societies, academia/universities, health authorities, institutes and other professional organizations are promoters and providers of CPD in many countries and Nepal is no exception and all the concerned stakeholders are expected to shoulder their responsibilities towards successful CPD program in Nepal. Because of ever growing awareness about the need of CPD system and its' role in renewal of practicing license in medical, dental and allied fields, we Nepalese doctors, our professional associations, councils, societies and concerned government authority should think seriously about implementation of suitable CPD system for Nepalese practicing doctors and health professionals.

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