

Certified success?

Surely the real motivation behind all training and education is to improve the development of the people involved in an organisation for the benefit of both customers (patients) and the business itself?

Recertification is about to descend upon us, and it appears that everyone is talking about it in the dental media. With the prospect of a compulsory scheme looming on the horizon we are encouraged by the General Dental Council to participate in the Preparatory Scheme that is to be launched on October 1st this year. An increasing number of educational providers (the *BDJ* among them) are preparing to provide different ways for helping dentists satisfy the basic requirements, and we shall doubtless see many more over the coming months.

The details of the scheme are simple. Dentists who wish to remain on the Dentists Register will have to complete 250 hours of continuing professional development (CPD) every five years, of which 75 hours are verifiable (in other words someone can check on it). The choices for how these hours are spent and the subjects covered will be left to the judgement of the individual. The literature on recertification has been careful to make the point that there are many different ways of achieving CPD, and perhaps of more importance that many dentists are already involved in CPD activities but possibly unaware of it. For example, someone who spends an hour reading the *BDJ* twice a month will have achieved 240 hours of general CPD over a five year period.

I have two concerns about the progress of this initiative so far. The first refers to the understandable perception that recertification is all about self-governance for the profession. Too little attention has been paid (and not just in dentistry) to the value that dentists and practices will gain from the exercise. While one purpose of CPD is obviously to ensure protection of the public, surely the real motivation behind all training and education is to improve the development of the people involved in an organisation for the benefit of both customers (patients) and the business itself? The two go hand in hand.

My second concern is more important. Generally, little emphasis has been given in dental postgraduate education as to how people select the most appropriate topics for themselves and the team. What little has been done tends to focus on broad areas people would like, such as surveys of local practitioners. The problem is that these surveys simply ask for choices between endodontics or practice management (say) rather than asking people to identify their current business objectives and training needs.

A recognised model for identifying the training needs of the people in an organisation already exists, called a training needs analysis (TNA). The focus of this model is to identify the gaps in knowledge and skills that individuals in an organisation need in order to help the organisation achieve its objectives. This is the foundation upon which all training, including CPD, rests (as those who have achieved Investors in People know). While we need to focus on identifying those areas where our knowledge and ability require improvement, we must also ensure that we focus on achieving the objectives of the business.

The vital link in the TNA model described above is the link between the gaps in knowledge and ability of the people in the organisation and the objectives of that organisation. Simply attending the local postgraduate course because it is there, is hardly an effective use of time but attending the course because you know you will improve your knowledge (or skills) in an area you have identified to help you reach your practice objectives makes sense. It also makes the exercise much more valuable for everyone concerned.

The *BDJ* will be publishing a series of articles on this topic in the near future as part of our continuing commitment to CPD. After all, if everyone is getting involved in Lifelong Learning then it seems to make sense to ensure we gain the most value out of it that we can.

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