Chapter 1

Lifelong learning and continuing professional development

This chapter addresses:
1. lifelong learning as an underpinning philosophy for all personal learning and development;
2. the nature of employment and competent performance in practice;
3. definitions and meaning of continuing professional development.

Introduction

The Preface of this book sets out the premise on which this book is written. The Preface acknowledges the need for health and social care professionals to remain competent in the work that they do and thus to be able to undertake their work with service users competently and confidently within the constraints of an ever-challenging and ever-changing health and social care environment. However, this is only part of the story as the Preface advocates learning to fulfil wider ambitions throughout life. This chapter is first and foremost concerned with lifelong learning, a notion that is more wide-ranging than continuing professional development (CPD). This chapter sets the scene for CPD by first offering a more liberal view of lifelong learning as an underpinning philosophy for all personal learning and development. It establishes lifelong learning as a highly desirable activity for everyone regardless of any legal responsibilities that come with being a health or social care professional. This chapter explores the advantages of taking personal responsibility for engaging in development activities for life.

Later chapters in this book explore the rationale for CPD in both a legal and professional sense and address various ways in which competence to practise can be both maintained and advanced. It is worth looking beyond the constraints of the legal requirements in order to explore the nature of learning and the advantages it
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brings within a lifetime. Lifelong learning activities thus become personally desirable and meaningful activities rather than selected activities to confirm ongoing fitness to practise. This book offers a source of information for all those wishing to learn to improve their career prospects and develop their competence for new roles and responsibilities in their field of work or wider career. First, there is a need to explore lifelong learning as a background to all aspects of life in support of employment and career enhancement.

Lifelong learning

The concept of lifelong learning is considered to have come to prominence early in the last century, although it is thought that the notion of learning through life goes back to the time of Plato (http://www.infed.org/lifelonglearning/b-life.htm; accessed 10 September 2012). Lifelong learning is to be distinguished from lifelong education. Education essentially comprises activities normally planned by an education provider, whereas learning is viewed as a cognitive process internal to the learner. Learning occurs through both incidental learning experienced by the learner and by the learner engaging with planned educational experiences, thus through both informal and formal learning opportunities. Lifelong learning is said to foster the continuous improvement of knowledge and skills for personal fulfilment as well as for employment. Often, lifelong learning entails the learner drawing on a mixture of educational programmes and informal learning to develop both capability and potential for managing all aspects of life, including formal employment as desired.

Lifelong learning has been variously defined. One of the more neutral definitions comes from the European Commission. It states that lifelong learning is:

all learning activity undertaken throughout life, with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competence, within a personal, civic, social and/or employment-related perspective (European Commission, 2001, p. 9).

This definition embraces all learning, both formal and informal, that occurs from birth to old age and is not specific to learning for or in employment. There are many stages of learning throughout life. Initially, we use innate senses to set us on the road to survival and development, but very early on in our existence, our efforts become increasingly more focused in order to meet personal needs and goals. These needs and goals change over time and our learning capacity extends to cope with the changing demands of work and family life. Informal learning at home and compulsory formal education in school provide us with the grounding for future life and, for many people, the academic qualifications that will form the entry requirements for more specialised education and training. According to Brownhill (2001, p. 73), education and learning are transformational, ‘developing an individual’s capacity to be a rational autonomous person who respects others . . . this is achieved mainly by the process of learning and self-reflection on that learning’. Lifelong learning thus supports us through all stages of life. It underpins the self-fulfilment of each person and not just the requirements of competent performance in a professional role.
The attributes and qualities of the lifelong learner have been researched (Candy, 2000) and are perceived to be as follows:

- An enquiring mind
- ‘Helicopter vision’
- Information literacy
- A sense of personal agency
- A repertoire of learning skills
- Interpersonal skills and group membership

However, these attributes are more likely to be recognised within a formal academic environment rather than through working relationships within informal settings. Individuals may still possess these skills even if they go unrecognised. An enquiring mind may lead naturally to personal development through learning from experiences. Those with a sense of personal agency will take steps to engage with new projects and new ventures. They will gather information and use problem-solving skills to develop their capacity to progress in their endeavours. People who value learning will do so for self-fulfilment often without recognising that they are also developing themselves as autonomous lifelong learners. For example, many people in retirement continue learning for self-fulfilment. As far as learning capacity is concerned, those who can draw on a variety of personal learning strategies will benefit most from different learning experiences. Working with others offers opportunity to engage in meaningful conversations and gain different perspectives on new experiences. Every new experience helps build capability for use in later situations.

Lifelong learning is thus wider than making an effort to maintain competence to practise in the professional role. It supports career development and other significant life changes. Lifelong learning thus spans a wide range of education and training initiatives and informal learning opportunities to promote the development of new knowledge and skills, flexibility, creativity, adaptability, preparedness for career and lifestyle change and self-fulfilment at any time of life. Changes may also embrace time out of paid employment, for example maternity leave or the resumption of a career after a career break. They may include changes following redundancy or progression into retirement. Lifelong learning experiences can help make a success of these transitions. A commitment to lifelong learning and CPD can help individuals to counteract the impact of change as well as prepare them for new roles within or beyond a professional career.

**Employability**

A professional career commences with an education that prepares the individual for a chosen profession or role in employment. Employability denotes a person’s capability of being employed in a job (van der Heijden, 2002) and is increasingly used as a measure of success by universities, colleges and other education and training institutions. These institutions are expected to ensure not only that graduates have the specialist skills for their chosen trade or profession but also that they are accomplished
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in key skills that will help them gain and maintain employment. Key skills are commonly perceived as:
- communication skills;
- teamwork;
- skills of analysis;
- problem-solving skills and creativity;
- enterprise and self-management skills;
- ability to work with technology.

Graduates should also have the incentive for lifelong learning. Education establishments thus are expected to help further develop the skills that underpin lifelong learning. Cheetham and Chivers (1999) initially referred to a selection of these skills as the metacompetencies of competent performance recognised as common across all professions. They went on to define four areas of competence that would vary from profession to profession, namely (1) knowledge/cognitive competence, (2) functional competence, (3) personal behavioural competence and (4) values and ethical competence. A good grounding in the competence requirements of the chosen profession and well-developed employability skills should help secure the new graduate a job. Research has indicated that transition to another job depends more on the possession of a wide range of professional skills and the capability to adjust flexibly to changing circumstances (van der Heijden, 2002). A focus on developing professional expertise is thus important for career mobility. Those with career aspirations need to ensure not only that they remain fit to practise but also that they develop their professional expertise beyond the level of initial competence to practise. Employability is thus a phenomenon that draws on lifelong learning to show the ongoing development and application of key skills in more challenging areas of practice.

The professional career

Definitions of career have changed over time. Arthur et al. (1989) adopted the definition of career as ‘the evolving sequence of a person’s work experiences over time’ (p. 8). This definition provided a ‘moving perspective’ that the authors considered important, and that acknowledged personal growth and changes over time, and the relationship between a person and a changing society. In 2002, Hall noted changes that had taken place, particularly in relation to organisational change as workplaces grew, merged, downsized and otherwise reinvented themselves, impacting significantly on the workforce. The new term protean career (Hall, 2002) came to suggest a greater emphasis on the needs of the person rather than the organisation and an acknowledgement that change of employment over time was becoming the norm. Changes in career direction became acceptable practice, offering opportunities for individuals to seek a greater sense of meaning and purpose in their working life. Work–life balance also gained momentum and came to have a bearing on employment decisions. Part-time employment became the choice of some employees who just wanted greater freedom in their life to pursue other interests
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beyond work. Generally speaking, however, opportunity to create personal security in work came from the development of skills and an ability to learn rather than from reliance on organisational need. A belief in one’s own talents and capacity would allow for more risk-taking. Any uncertainty about jobs drives the need for lifelong learning. Practitioners must take responsibility regularly to review their situation individually, with a mentor or through work appraisal, and consider their longer term future. Relevant personal and professional development opportunities can then be planned. These matters are further addressed in later chapters.

Portfolio careers

Handy (1990) coined the phrase ‘portfolio people’, denoting those people who had a flexible approach to using their time productively. Just as Arthur et al. (1989) viewed a career as a sequence of jobs, Handy saw the merits of individuals having a variety of employment options, that is, a portfolio of different types of work that could be undertaken simultaneously. Some employment might be paid work and some might be unpaid. For example, undertaking further study or engaging in creative activity or voluntary work might not necessarily contribute to income generation. These might be elective activities that meet a different need and offer personal fulfilment. Some activities, such as gaining an educational qualification, may provide the groundwork for generating income in a different career at a later date. The political context of work can, from time to time, mean that employment is hard to find. Even those working in health or social care environments may not be immune from redundancy if new policies demand reorganisation or where financial savings must be made by the employing organisation. Professionals finding themselves without employment will need to review their options for future employment and the most productive way in which their unique talents may be used. Working flexibly in different paid and/or unpaid occupations may be the best option at the time, rather than one of choice. Some people may not be able to afford to pursue a portfolio of activities as a full-time wage may be important. For others, particularly health care professionals, a portfolio of different types of part-time paid employment may offer much needed financial reward and also enhance job satisfaction. For example, part-time employment in a health or social care organisation and part-time private practice might bring a full-time income. As Handy (1990, p. 214) remarked, ‘The redefinition of work in modern society is changing the way we look at our lives and at our priorities.’ Any changes to employment in services governed by politics are unpredictable. Strategies for lifelong learning must have their place on the agenda of any health and social care professional working in such organisations. Not only can lifelong learning experiences help transform jobs into exciting careers as they inform the development of new practices and bring benefits for employers, but they can also help prepare professionals for new challenges and opportunities that economic or political changes might bring.

In an uncertain financial climate, planning for a future in retirement is even more important. An ageing population has meant that some governments have increasing expectations that individuals work well into their 60s and possibly their 70s before
they are eligible for a pension and that they plan for their retirement. The nature of employment may well change as we get older and a portfolio approach to using time productively in different ways may well assist the transition that inevitably must be made. The portfolio career enables individuals to maintain control of their working life, to plan for and adjust to different stages of their life, to engage in different types of activities that bring different kinds of pleasures and rewards and to manage all the transitions that might be expected for a productive life and retirement.

Given the many changes in the environment and the world of work, in individuals’ expectations of a career and in relation to the ways in which individuals may choose to spend their time, it is not surprising that other definitions of ‘career’ have been coined. In a review of the term ‘career’, Hall (2002) suggested that it had variously been seen as follows:

- Advancement, that is upward mobility of a person within an organisation.
- A career, that is advancement within a profession as a career.
- A lifelong series of jobs irrespective of the type of occupation or direction of movement.
- A lifelong sequence of role-related experiences that includes paid and unpaid roles.

Hall acknowledged a shift towards focusing on the process of a career and increasingly on a person’s right to make choices about employment opportunities. In this respect, values and attitudes come into play. The definition that emerged for Hall was that a career is ‘the individually perceived sequence of attitudes and behaviours associated with work-related experiences and activities over the span of the person’s life’ (Hall, 2002, p. 12).

Thus, work meets numerous personal needs, not just physiological and safety needs but also affiliation, achievement and self-actualisation. However, in order to do this, it is up to individuals to take responsibility for decisions associated with work and other roles. Some decisions may require forward planning and some may demand risk-taking. The choice rests with the individual who is ultimately viewed as an active agent in making choices regarding their career and their career development. A career can go through different stages throughout life as personal circumstances and values change and also as the external environment changes (Woodd, 2000). For this reason, Woodd advocated the need for individuals to continuously review and update plans for career development. Meeting the CPD requirements of the regulatory body will enable professionals to keep practising, but will not necessarily ensure employment. Lifelong learning strategies that enable individuals to develop and grow place them in a stronger position for ongoing employment or for venturing into self-employment.

**Ethics and quality of care delivery**

CPD has so far been considered as a regulatory requirement that health and social care professionals keep up to date with their practice. Each professional may also be subject to a code of ethics set out by their professional body. Both professional and regulatory bodies tend to have standards or statements that reflect their requirements
with regard to professionals’ ethical behaviour and practice, placing the responsibility firmly with the individual to act in accordance with these expectations. Employing organisations also expect health and social care professionals to continue to maintain and develop their competence to practise so as to offer efficient and effective service delivery and, wherever possible, quality improvement in practice. Evidence-based practice or minimally evidence-informed practice is strongly encouraged. This places a clear responsibility on each professional to keep up to date with best practice that is informed by research so as to be able to practise ethically and knowledgably. Whilst health and social care services will have a vested interest in encouraging and supporting CPD and in developing expertise in practice, the financial burden for professional development may well rest with the individual. Any organisational support will be welcome, but where organisations are working with financial constraints, the funds to support professional development may not be forthcoming. Some employers tend to have only a minimal interest in employees’ development beyond the essential legal requirements of health and safety. Therefore, each professional must take responsibility for planning and participating in development activities so as to at least meet the expected standards. As will be shown in later chapters, not all professional development activities need be costly. A wide range of development activities can be undertaken freely in the workplace or otherwise in association with work-related activities and provide significant opportunities for learning and for the enhancement of practice.

Competence to practise

An exploration of literature leads to the conclusion that ‘competence to practise’ is a difficult concept to define. Eraut (1994, p. 117) spoke of qualification as being ‘a rite of passage into the professional world’, ‘the climax of rule-guided learning’ (p. 125). The qualification confers a social status on individuals and indicates to the general public that those qualified are competent to practise. Barnett (1994) further suggested that competence denoted that an individual could perform tasks to an expected standard. However, he also acknowledged that such a statement was simplistic. He observed that we lived in a changing society, so today’s competence might not be suited to tomorrow’s client needs and, therefore, calling into question the state of competence beyond the point of qualification. Eraut (2003, p. 1) even called it an ‘unproved assumption’ that a professional’s performance at the point of qualification met the standards for competence, but acknowledged that the assumption was historical and that it was the qualification that became the requirement for a legal license to practise. Obtaining a qualification was only the first step towards continuing learning (Haines, 1997). Gonczi (1999, p. 184) helped clarify some of these assumptions by stating that competence standards developed for any given occupation represented ‘the best attempts of a representative group of stakeholders to state the attributes needed to perform the major tasks in the occupation at a particular point in time’. He suggested that they were, however, general attributes for possible contexts of practice but had to evolve as new situations were encountered. This
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reinforced Barnett’s view that competence had to change with social change. Eraut (2003) later suggested that definitions of competence might be divided into those that were individually situated (perceived as attributes of the individual) and those that were socially situated (perceived as situated at the interface between the individual and the society served). He concluded that the latter statement better reflected notions of competence. Griffin and Brownhill (2001) went further to suggest that competence was more than just about reaching a standard, it was embedded in a professional ideology that included a duty to maintain competence at a high level by careful practice and by keeping up to date with developments in the profession. Autonomous professionals thus were expected to have a lifelong commitment to maintaining levels of excellence in practice, arguably more than standard competence. Thus, with qualification and professional status comes the associated responsibility for ensuring continuing competence to practise in a changing world (Alsop, 2001).

The earlier book (Alsop, 2000) focused quite considerably on what constituted competence to practise and hypothesised on how the new regulatory body for UK allied health professionals (the incoming Health Professions Council – HPC) might judge competence, incompetence and lack of competence. As it happens now, competence is not a word that is strongly reflected in the HPC or Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) literature. The HCPC is more concerned with fitness to practise and that registrants meet its current Standards of Proficiency, Standards of Education, Standards of Conduct, Performance and Ethics and Standards of Continuing Professional Development. The regulatory body is, however, still concerned with how professionals continue their development in the light of changing circumstances. Competence has to be considered as both general and context specific and therefore not static. So, competence in one situation may not be transferable to another. As changes occur in the external environment, practice has to change accordingly, calling ‘competence’ or ‘fitness to practise’ into question. Judgements also have to be made about the competence of experts, as opposed to those recently qualified, who will have been judged against the original HPC standards.

The notion of competence to practise thus leads us to consider what professional practice is all about, especially for the health and social care professions. Maintaining competence in an ever-changing world of practice is clearly a responsibility of all professionals. Autonomous professionals should recognise this responsibility and should strive continually to enhance their knowledge and understanding of practice on a daily basis through everyday practice and then periodically through more focused learning opportunities as a contribution to lifelong learning. Higgs and Titchen (2001) explored some of the dimensions of professional practice and claimed that it was people centred, context relevant, authentic and wise. A wise practitioner brings a higher level of knowledge to practice; a capacity to see the bigger picture and meaningful, creative possibilities rather than just solutions. Wise practice embraces the notion of transformation, particularly in relation to transforming practice through careful evaluation of practice and through research initiatives. Accountability also features strongly. Decisions and actions taken by professionals can significantly affect the lives of clients, so maintaining up-to-date professional knowledge is critical to the professional judgements that have to be made, and for which individual professionals
are accountable (Ewing & Smith, 2001). Competence to practise is thus the starting point recognised in the attainment of the basic professional qualification. CPD is not only a requirement of continuing registration with a regulatory body but also a fundamental responsibility of a professional to ensure a high level of expertise for serving the needs of clients in the current climate of health and social care delivery.

**Continuing professional development**

Various definitions of CPD can be found in the literature, but for this book, it is important to consider definitions to which professionals working in health and social care can relate. In the earlier edition of this book, the definition used was as follows:

Continuing professional development (CPD) is a term commonly used to denote the process of the on-going education and development of health care professionals, from initial qualifying education and for the duration of professional life, in order to maintain competence to practise and increase professional proficiency and expertise (Alsop, 2000, p. 1).

A further definition that has particular relevance to members of the Chartered Institute of Personnel Development (CIPD) is also useful for health and social care professionals:

Continuing professional development (CPD) is a process by which individuals take control of their own learning and development, by engaging in an on-going process of reflection and action (Megginson & Whitaker, 2007, p. 3).

The combination of messages in these two definitions probably provides a comprehensive view of CPD that places the responsibility firmly with the individual. The individual must:

- recognise that CPD is necessary and the value of undertaking it;
- take control of the process;
- select, initiate, plan and complete relevant learning activities;
- reflect on the process and identify the new learning that has been experienced;
- maintain a record of that learning and its relevance to practice in an appropriate format so that it can be made available to those authorised to review it.

Any health or social care practitioner registered with a regulatory body must additionally meet the specific requirements of that body, and these vary considerably across continents. Each regulatory body across the world has its own definition, standards and requirements of those expected to maintain their competence to practise through continuous learning. Registrants should thus acquaint themselves with the specific requirements of their regulatory body.

The UK HPC (now the HCPC), for example, defined CPD as follows:

A range of learning activities through which health professionals maintain and develop throughout their career to ensure that they retain their capacity to practise safely, effectively and legally within their evolving scope of practice (HPC, 2010, p. 6).
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This definition has a specific remit to support regulated professionals in meeting their obligation to practise safely, legally and ethically, and the regulatory body’s ultimate remit to protect the public. One further definition is that coined in a joint statement on CPD for health and social care practitioners:

[CPD] is fundamental to the development of all health and social care practitioners, and is the mechanism through which high quality patient and client care is identified, maintained and developed (RCN, 2007, p. 2).

This statement is useful as not only it clarifies that CPD focuses on an outcome of high-quality patient and client care but the document also specifies that these development activities exclude those that are otherwise required by law, for example manual handling training. Furthermore, it suggests that a minimum 6 days per year should be granted by employers to facilitate this learning activity.

CPD is unquestionably a professional responsibility. However, it also brings personal gains. Undertaking CPD is about recognising the duty of care and taking pride in all aspects of work with and for service users; it is about enhancing personal skills and confidence and thus professional capability; it is about investing in oneself as well as developing the knowledge and skills required by employers. Any investment in CPD could bring just rewards especially at times when competition for jobs is strong. CPD ultimately adds interest to the job and becomes the building blocks on which a professional career is founded. Autonomous professionals should not wait for CPD opportunities to be offered but should actively seek out opportunities that support their ambitions and career goals. CPD does not have to be expensive nor depend on funding from employers. This book offers many suggestions for CPD activities that can be pursued with little or no cost. Funding may, however, be available for CPD that will clearly enhance service provision or bring efficiency savings. A case for funding would normally have to be made, and even if successful, full funding may not be forthcoming. Applicants need to be prepared to supplement any financial grant they receive in order to engage in the selected CPD activity. However, this still becomes an investment for the future.

Summary

This chapter has considered the value of lifelong learning for personal and career development throughout life. Lifelong learning has a wide remit assisting an individual to become self-fulfilled and participate in education, work or leisure pursuits throughout life. The development of general skills for employment forms an essential feature of all graduate education. For health and social care professionals, formal university education has to meet the specific requirements of regulatory and professional bodies, addressing features of competence and fitness to practise in the chosen profession. Contemporary definitions of a career have been discussed and applied to careers in health and social care. Personal and professional development has been shown to be essential for the maintenance of high-quality care. Definitions of continuing professional development (CPD) have set the scene for wider discussions on the CPD expectations of regulatory bodies and the audit process. CPD is the term that tends to be used by regulatory bodies as a legal requirement for continuing registration.
References