ABSTRACT: The importance of Continuing Physiotherapy Education (CPE) courses as an aspect of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) is discussed. Using a questionnaire, a study was conducted to assess various aspects pertaining to a CPE course on “Mobilisation of the Nervous System”. Results showed that a majority of participants favoured courses of one day duration and were interested in further courses on this topic. This and a subsequent course on the same subject were rated (0-10) by the participants and compared. The second course achieved a higher mean score (9.3 versus 8.0) and 10/10 score (47% versus 12%, p<0.05) compared to the first course. The results suggest that improved course presentation and materials can be achieved, based on the analysis of information gained from the use of questionnaires completed by course participants. Evaluation of CPE courses is valuable and should form an integral part of CPE course planning, preparation and modification.

KEYWORDS: CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT, CONTINUING PHYSIOTHERAPY EDUCATION, COURSES, QUESTIONNAIRES

INTRODUCTION

“Continuing professional development (CPD) is about the individual’s responsibility for ensuring that he or she is up to date and therefore a safe and competent practitioner” (CSP, 1996). This statement was issued by the Research Development Group of the Chartered Society of Physiotherapy and the term CPD is used to describe the ongoing learning that professionals need to undertake throughout their career in order to maintain, enhance and broaden their professional competence (CSP, 1994b). CPD is the term currently used internationally and chosen by the Interim National Medical and Dental Council of South Africa (INMDCSA) in their recent proposal for compulsory continuing education and training for health professionals (INMDCSA, 1997). Continuing Physiotherapy Education (CPE) is an important and valued aspect of CPD and the prominent role which CPE courses play in ensuring continuing professional development is widely recognized and acknowledged. CPD is synonymous with Continuous Quality Improvement, a concept which incorporates but goes beyond CPE (Jobson, 1996; CSP, 1995a).

Post-basic courses in CPE are well established and attended in South Africa; they serve to update qualified physiotherapists’ knowledge and skills (CSP, 1994b; CSP, 1995a; Titchen, 1987), and these courses form an essential part of the Continuing Professional Development strategy of the South African Society of Physiotherapy. There has been little published research on CPE courses in South Africa and it was thought that research into the quality or effectiveness of these courses (Cross, 1995; Muller and Funnell, 1991) would be valuable in the implementation of further courses and in the evaluation of the CPE needs of graduates.

During 1995 the Winelands Branch of the SA Society of Physiotherapy was founded and the organising committee planned a program of several CPE courses to be presented during 1996. “Mobilisation of the Nervous System/neural mobilisation” is an aspect of physiotherapy that has gained much importance in the literature (Shacklock, 1995; Butler, 1989; Butler & Gifford, 1989; Butler, 1991), in the application of clinical reasoning, in the use of techniques for treatment and in home programmes/self-treatment regimes. A one day course on “neural mobilisation” was included in the program and because there are many graduates currently practising who have had no undergraduate teaching in this field of physiotherapy, a course aimed at teaching the basic concepts and techniques in “neural mobilisation” was planned.

It is logical that assessing the needs of participants in CPE courses as well as evaluation of the effectiveness of these courses to meet their needs is an important aspect of CPE course preparation. When planning the CPE course on “neural mobilisation” the lecturer compiled a questionnaire which was administered after completion of the course. It was felt that a critical analysis of the “neural mobilisation” course would help to assess the requisites of further CPE courses, aid format planning of further courses and provide valuable information on the specific needs of the participants.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

A one day basic course on “neural mobilisation” was planned and the course was limited to 30 participants, this being the maximum number of students that both the venue and a single lecturer could accommodate.

The course was over-subscribed with a total of 41 applications received. As a result 30 people were accepted for the initial course and the remainder placed on a waiting list for a repeat course scheduled to be held one month after the first one. The second course was advertised and a total of 17 physiotherapists attended this course held the following month at the same venue.

The format of the questionnaire employed is shown in Appendix I. It was aimed to assess:
1. previous exposure to neural mobilisation teaching
2. comments about the course presentation, content and length

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3. interest in further CPE courses and
4. the participants' rating of the effect-
iveness of the course presented.
Twenty-nine physiotherapists attended
the first course (course A) and were
handed the course questionnaire at the
end of the day. The questionnaires were
collected after course A and analysed for
criticism, suggestions and recommenda-
tions which could be used to improve the
content, format and presentation of the
subsequent course (course B).
Various modifications were subse-
quently made to the course presentation.
These included more applied theory,
longer practical sessions, omission of the
patient demonstration and additional
copies of several extra review articles.
Course B was presented one month after
course A and the same questionnaire was
used and subsequently the results of
courses A and B were compared.

Groups were compared using non-
parametric statistical methods as appro-
priate. A value of p<0.05 was taken as
statistically significant.

RESULTS
A total of 46 physiotherapists attended
the 2 courses and 40 questionnaires were
completed (25 from course A and 15
from course B).
Approximately 50% of the participants
had received previous teaching in “neur-
al mobilisation”, however, only a small
minority of this group had attended
courses of 1 day or longer. Eighty seven
per cent (87%) of participants expressed
an interest to attend further CPE courses
on “neural mobilisation”. The results are
shown in Table 1.
The duration of CPE courses is an
important aspect to be considered and a
definite preference for short courses was
noted. The majority of participants chose
half to one day courses with only 12.5%
being in favour of longer courses.

COURSE QUESTIONNAIRE

Please answer the following in an attempt to provide valuable feedback for
other course presentations.

1. Have you had any previous teaching on neural mobilisation?
   (Tick appropriate block) YES [ ] NO [ ]

Indicate previous lectures/courses attended:
A. Single lecture .................................................................
B. Day course .................................................................
C. 2 - 3 day course ...........................................................

2. Comment on this course/suggestions and criticisms welcome.

Length: ........................................................................
Content: ....................................................................
Presentation: ..............................................................
Theory: ........................................................................
Practical: .....................................................................
Other: .......................................................................... 

3. Would you be interested in attending a further course in neurodynamics? ...

4. If yes, state preference:
   Saturday a.m. = 1/2 day
   Saturday all day = 1 day
   Friday p.m. and Saturday = 1 and 1/2 days 

5. What are your needs for a further course? 

........................................................................................
........................................................................................
........................................................................................
........................................................................................
........................................................................................

6. Rate your overall impression of this course on the 0 - 10 scale where
   0 = totally ineffective, and 10 = excellent.
   0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
group felt that the supervision was adequate in contrast to the previous group of 29 where a few had requested more practical supervision. This suggests that where a single lecturer is involved in CPE courses, it would be advantageous to ask for assistance from additional clinical supervisors for the practical sessions if the group exceeds 20 people.

This study suggests that course questionnaires can be a valuable aid in assisting the presenter in the planning, preparation and modification of further CPE courses and that basic CPE courses in "neural mobilisation" fulfill an important need in the Western Cape, and possibly further afield. The successful modification of this course to meet the needs of the participants is an indication that course evaluation by analysis of questionnaires is both valuable and should form an integral part of CPE course planning and preparation. "Research is only of wider value if its findings can be made available and accessible to those who can learn from it" (CSP, 1994a), and it is hoped that this study will stimulate further enquiry into both the needs and the effectiveness of CPE within this country. The Chartered Society of Physiotherapy recommends a comprehensive list of skills which should be acquired by clinicians involved in college education (CSP, 1995b), and this study was an attempt to use these skills constructively, resulting in better prepared teaching and improved quality of learning experiences for the students. There is an inexorable march of quality assurance into the field of education (Cross, 1995) and the SASP should be in a position to monitor Continuing Physiotherapy Education so that this vital aspect of Continuing Professional Development can continually be reviewed and improved. CPE courses and the presenters of these courses have received little review in South Africa. It would appear that critical appraisal of courses and the establishment of a standardized questionnaire for evaluation would be helpful to ensure high standards of practice in Continuing Physiotherapy Education.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author thanks the Winelands branch, SA Society of Physiotherapy for arranging the courses that made these studies possible. The advice of Prof PG Bardin with the preparation of the manuscript is acknowledged, statistical help was given by Dr E van Schalkwyk and excellent secretarial assistance was provided by Ms Tarsia Paterson.

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### Table 1. Results of Courses A and B Questionnaire

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Course A</th>
<th>Course B</th>
<th>Combined A &amp; B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Applicants</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attendants</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questionnaires</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prior N.M.</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest in</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow-up CPE</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In N.M.</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course duration</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preference:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/2 day</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 day</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 1/2 day</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* N.M. = "neural mobilisation"

+CPE = Continuing Physiotherapy Education

### Table 2. Rating of Courses A and B*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Course A</th>
<th>Course B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>9.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range</td>
<td>5 - 10</td>
<td>8 - 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Score of 10/10</td>
<td>3/25 (12%)</td>
<td>7/15 (47%)+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* For details of rating see Appendix 1

+p<0.05 (chi2)

### References


Interim National Medical and Dental Council of South Africa (1997), Consultation process and workshop on Continuing Education and Training.


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