

# CONTINUING PHYSIOTHERAPY EDUCATION COURSES:

## A CRITICAL APPRAISAL

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**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 effectiveness 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 recommendations which could be used to improve the content, format and presentation of the subsequent course (course B).

Various modifications were subsequently 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 appropriate. 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 "neural 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.

The participants' rating for the 2 courses was assessed and the results are shown in Table 2. Both courses were highly rated by the participating physiotherapists (mean for course A = 8 and course B = 9.3; maximum rating = 10), reflecting a high measure of satisfaction by attendees. As can be seen there was a significant improvement in the rating comparing courses A and B. It is noteworthy that a statistically higher number of participants gave course B a 10/10 rating (47%,  $p < 0.05$ ), suggesting that there had been a marked improvement in the follow-up course.

## DISCUSSION

Considerable interest was shown by physiotherapists in CPE in "neural mobilisation" and although the course was presented twice in order to accommodate all the applicants, there have been continued enquiries about the possibilities of repeating this course in the Western Cape and further afield. This considerable interest, added to the fact that approximately 50% of the participants had no previous teaching in this field suggests that many graduate physiotherapists have had limited or no undergraduate teaching in "neural mobilisation". CPE courses are thus essential to augment their knowledge.

The vast majority (87%) of the participants were interested in attending further courses in "neural mobilisation", however, most were not in favour of courses longer than one day. The fact that most attendees preferred shorter courses probably reflects the practical constraints imposed by courses lasting longer than a day, whereby participants have to arrange overnight accommodation and make special domestic arrangements (Titchen, 1987). It is also possible that the higher cost of longer courses may limit attendance (Taylor and Mitchell, 1990). Finally, it is possible that the physical and emotional demands of physiotherapy practice preclude interest in courses longer than one day.

The course rating for the second course was significantly improved reflecting successful modifications based on information obtained from the first course questionnaire. This significantly improved rating as well as the higher 100% rating for course B was encouraging and an indication that the course had been successfully adapted on the basis of the analysis of the information obtained from the questionnaires from course A.

The smaller group attending course B enabled the lecturer to supervise the practical sessions more easily and this

## COURSE QUESTIONNAIRE

## APPENDIX I

*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" fulfil 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 clinical 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 very 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.

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**TABLE 1. RESULTS OF COURSES A AND B QUESTIONNAIRE**

	COURSE A	COURSE B	COMBINED A & B
Applicants	41	17	
Attendants	29	17	46
Completed questionnaires	25	15	40
*Prior N.M. teaching	13	8	21
+Interest in follow-up CPE in N.M.	22	13	35
Course duration preference:			
1/2 day	11	3	14
1 day	12	9	21
1 1/2 day	3	2	5
* N.M. = "neural mobilisation"			
+CPE = Continuing Physiotherapy Education			

**TABLE 2. RATING OF COURSES A AND B\***

	COURSE A	COURSE B
Mean	8.0	9.3
Range	5 - 10	8 - 10
Score of 10/10	3/25 (12%)	7/15 (47%)+
* For details of rating see Appendix 1		
+p<0.05 (chi2)		

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