

Exploring the Impact of Continuing Professional Development on Pharmacist Practice: Understanding How Ongoing Education and Professional Development Opportunities Influence and Enhance Pharmacists' Practice

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Abstract:

This qualitative study investigates the impact of continuing professional development (CPD) on pharmacists' practice. Through semi-structured interviews with 20 pharmacists from various practice settings, the study aims to understand how ongoing education and professional development opportunities influence and enhance pharmacists' professional practice. Findings reveal that CPD contributes significantly to improving clinical skills, knowledge, and patient care. However, barriers such as time constraints and access to resources were identified. The study underscores the importance of CPD in maintaining and advancing the quality of pharmacy practice and suggests strategies to overcome the challenges faced by pharmacists in engaging with CPD.

Keywords: Continuing Professional Development, Pharmacist Practice, Ongoing Education, Professional Development, Pharmacy Practice, Qualitative Study, Clinical Skills, Patient Care.

Introduction

The landscape of pharmacy practice is continuously evolving, driven by advancements in pharmaceutical sciences, healthcare technologies, and evolving patient care needs. In this dynamic environment, pharmacists play a crucial role as frontline healthcare providers, tasked with ensuring safe and effective medication use and promoting optimal patient outcomes. To meet these demands and maintain competency, pharmacists engage in continuing professional development (CPD), a structured approach to lifelong learning that encompasses a variety of educational activities aimed at enhancing professional knowledge, skills, and abilities (Driesen et al., 2007).

CPD is integral to the pharmacy profession's commitment to excellence and ongoing improvement in patient care delivery. It encompasses diverse learning opportunities, including formal educational courses, workshops, conferences, self-directed learning modules, and experiential training (Aldosari, et al., 2020). These activities are designed not only to update pharmacists on the latest clinical guidelines and therapeutic advancements but also to foster critical thinking, evidence-based decision-making, and interprofessional collaboration (Lunenberget al., 2007).

The effectiveness of CPD in enhancing pharmacist practice has been widely recognized. Studies indicate that pharmacists who participate in CPD activities demonstrate improved clinical competence, confidence in decision-making, and adherence to professional standards. Furthermore, CPD plays a pivotal role in addressing emerging healthcare challenges, such as medication safety, antimicrobial stewardship, and chronic disease management, by equipping pharmacists with up-to-date knowledge and skills (Kurup et al., 2017; Ackermann et al., 2010).

Despite its benefits, engaging in CPD can present challenges for pharmacists. Common barriers include time constraints, financial limitations, access to relevant educational resources, and the competing demands of clinical practice (Liu et al., 2016; Curran et al., 2006). Understanding these challenges is essential for optimizing CPD effectiveness and ensuring that pharmacists can fully leverage educational opportunities to enhance their professional practice.

This qualitative study aims to explore in-depth how CPD influences and enhances pharmacists' professional practice across various practice settings. By examining pharmacists' experiences and perceptions through semi-structured interviews, the study seeks to uncover nuanced insights into the impact of ongoing education on clinical decision-making, patient interactions, and overall quality of care delivery. The findings will contribute to the existing literature by providing empirical evidence on the benefits of CPD and identifying strategies to overcome barriers, thereby informing policies and practices that support continuous professional development in pharmacy.

Literature Review

Continuing professional development (CPD) plays a pivotal role in the ongoing education and professional growth of pharmacists, ensuring they remain competent and effective healthcare providers in dynamic clinical environments. CPD encompasses a wide array of learning activities designed to enhance pharmacists' knowledge, skills, and competencies throughout their careers (International Pharmaceutical Federation, 2014). Research consistently demonstrates that engagement in CPD activities positively correlates with improved clinical practice and patient care outcomes (Rouse, 2004).

Impact on Pharmacists' Knowledge and Skills

Studies highlight that pharmacists who participate in CPD programs experience significant improvements in their clinical knowledge and decision-making abilities. For example, Schindel et al. (2019) found that pharmacists who regularly engaged in CPD reported heightened confidence in managing complex medication therapies and addressing patient-specific medication needs. This enhanced competence not only contributes to better patient outcomes but also fosters a sense of professional satisfaction and efficacy among pharmacists (Fjortoft et al., 2015).

Professional Growth and Job Satisfaction

Beyond skill enhancement, CPD is associated with greater job satisfaction and career advancement opportunities for pharmacists. Pharmacists who actively pursue CPD opportunities often demonstrate increased motivation, job engagement, and commitment to lifelong learning (Schindel et al., 2019). This proactive approach not only supports career progression but also cultivates a culture of continuous improvement and professional excellence within the pharmacy profession (International Pharmaceutical Federation, 2014).

Barriers to CPD Participation

Despite its recognized benefits, pharmacists encounter various barriers that hinder their participation in CPD activities. Time constraints due to demanding work schedules, financial costs associated with attending educational programs, and limited access to relevant and high-quality learning resources are among the primary challenges reported (McConnell et al., 2010). These barriers underscore the need for innovative approaches and supportive policies to facilitate pharmacists' engagement in meaningful CPD that aligns with their professional development needs and practice demands.

Tailoring CPD Programs to Address Pharmacist Needs

Recognizing the diverse practice settings and career stages of pharmacists, there is a growing call for CPD programs that are tailored to meet specific professional needs and interests. Tailored CPD initiatives can enhance relevance and effectiveness by addressing practice-specific challenges, fostering interprofessional collaboration, and integrating emerging healthcare trends into pharmacists' daily practice (American Pharmacists Association, 2020).

Methodology

Study Design

This qualitative study employed semi-structured interviews to explore the impact of continuing professional development (CPD) on pharmacists' practice. The study aimed to gain in-depth insights into how ongoing education and professional development opportunities influence and enhance pharmacists' professional capabilities.

Participants

A purposive sampling strategy was used to recruit licensed pharmacists from various practice settings, including community pharmacies, hospital pharmacies, and clinical settings. A total of 20 pharmacists participated in the study, ensuring a diverse representation of experiences and perspectives.

Data Collection

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews. Each interview lasted approximately 45 to 60 minutes and was conducted either in person or via video conferencing, depending on the participant's preference and availability. The interviews were audio-recorded with the participants' consent to ensure accuracy in data transcription.

The interview guide was developed based on a review of the literature and consisted of open-ended questions designed to elicit detailed responses.

Data Analysis

The audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed verbatim. Data analysis followed a thematic analysis approach, as described by Braun and Clarke (2006). The process involved several steps:

1. Familiarization with the Data:
 - Reading and re-reading the transcripts to immerse in the data.
2. Generating Initial Codes:
 - Systematically coding interesting features of the data across the entire dataset.
3. Searching for Themes:
 - Collating codes into potential themes and gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.
4. Reviewing Themes:
 - Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts and the entire dataset.
5. Defining and Naming Themes:
 - Refining each theme and generating clear definitions and names for each theme.
6. Producing the Report:

- Selecting vivid, compelling extract examples and relating the analysis back to the research questions and literature.

Ethical Considerations

The study was approved by the ethics committee. All participants provided informed consent before participating in the interviews. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the study, with pseudonyms used in the transcripts and final report to protect participants' identities.

Trustworthiness

To ensure the trustworthiness of the study, the following strategies were employed:

1. Credibility:

- Triangulation by collecting data from pharmacists in diverse practice settings.
- Member checking by sharing the preliminary findings with a subset of participants for validation.

2. Dependability:

- Detailed documentation of the research process, including data collection and analysis procedures.

3. Transferability:

- Providing thick descriptions of the participants and contexts to allow for potential transferability of the findings to similar settings.

4. Confirmability:

- Maintaining an audit trail of all research activities and decisions made during the study.

Findings

Theme 1: Perceived Impact of CPD on Clinical Practice

Sub-theme 1.1: Improved Clinical Knowledge and Skills

Participants acknowledged that CPD activities, such as workshops and certifications, enhanced their clinical knowledge and skills:

- Participant A: "Attending the recent workshop on diabetes management really improved my confidence in adjusting insulin dosages."
- Participant B: "The CPD modules on new drug therapies have been crucial in updating my knowledge and ensuring safer prescribing practices."

Sub-theme 1.2: Enhanced Patient Care Practices

CPD was seen as instrumental in improving patient care practices, including medication management and patient counseling:

- Participant C: "Learning about pharmacogenomics helped me tailor medication regimens better for patients with complex medical histories."
- Participant D: "CPD sessions on patient communication techniques have definitely improved my ability to engage with patients and address their concerns effectively."

Theme 2: Barriers to Engaging with CPD

Sub-theme 2.1: Time Constraints

Many participants cited time constraints as a significant barrier to engaging with CPD:

- Participant E: "With the demanding workload, finding time for CPD activities is challenging."
- Participant F: "I often have to prioritize immediate patient care over CPD, which limits my participation."

Sub-theme 2.2: Access to Quality Resources

Access to quality CPD resources, both in terms of content relevance and availability, was highlighted as a barrier:

- Participant G: "Finding CPD courses that are relevant to my practice area can be difficult."
- Participant H: "In our rural setting, access to workshops and training programs is limited compared to urban areas."

Theme 3: Support and Motivation for CPD Participation

Sub-theme 3.1: Organizational Support

Participants emphasized the importance of organizational support in facilitating CPD participation:

- Participant I: "Our hospital's commitment to providing CPD opportunities encourages me to stay updated."
- Participant J: "Having dedicated time and funding allocated for CPD shows that the organization values professional development."

Sub-theme 3.2: Intrinsic Motivation

Personal motivation and commitment to lifelong learning were significant factors driving CPD participation:

- Participant K: "I see CPD as essential to maintaining my professional competence and improving patient outcomes."
- Participant L: "Staying current with advancements in pharmacy practice is personally fulfilling and motivates me to seek out CPD opportunities."

Discussion

Summary of Findings

This qualitative study explored the impact of continuing professional development (CPD) on pharmacist practice, focusing on how ongoing education and professional development opportunities influence and enhance their professional capabilities. Key themes emerged regarding the perceived impact of CPD, barriers to engagement, and factors that support CPD participation among pharmacists.

Impact of CPD on Clinical Practice

The findings indicate that CPD plays a crucial role in improving pharmacists' clinical knowledge and skills. Participants highlighted how CPD activities, such as workshops and certifications, enhanced their ability to manage medication therapies effectively and provide patient-centered care. This aligns with previous research suggesting that CPD contributes to ongoing professional growth and competence in pharmacy practice ((Schindel et al., 2019;Rouse, 2004).

Moreover, CPD was perceived as instrumental in expanding pharmacists' scope of practice, particularly in areas like pharmacogenomics and chronic disease management. This not only benefits individual pharmacists in terms of career advancement but also enhances overall patient care outcomes (Fjortoft et al., 2015).

Barriers to Engaging with CPD

Despite its benefits, several barriers hinder pharmacists' engagement with CPD. Time constraints emerged as a primary challenge, with pharmacists often prioritizing immediate patient care duties over CPD activities. This finding resonates with previous studies highlighting workload pressures as a barrier to professional development in healthcare settings (Schindel et al., 2019).

Access to quality CPD resources was another significant barrier identified by participants. Many pharmacists expressed difficulty in finding relevant and accessible CPD opportunities, especially in rural or underserved areas. This underscores the need for diversified and easily accessible CPD platforms that cater to the diverse needs of pharmacists across different practice settings (McConnell et al., 2010).

Support and Motivation for CPD Participation

Organizational support emerged as a crucial facilitator of CPD participation among pharmacists. Participants noted that institutions that prioritize and allocate resources for CPD, such as dedicated time and funding, fostered a conducive environment for professional development. This organizational commitment not only motivates pharmacists to engage more actively in CPD but also signals the importance of lifelong learning within the profession (International Pharmaceutical Federation, 2014).

Intrinsic motivation also played a pivotal role in driving pharmacists' participation in CPD. Many participants expressed a personal commitment to staying updated with advancements in pharmacy practice and improving patient outcomes through continuous learning. This intrinsic drive reflects a culture of professionalism and dedication to excellence among pharmacists (Rouse, 2004).

Recommendations and Implications for Practice

Based on the findings, several recommendations can be made to enhance CPD effectiveness and accessibility for pharmacists:

1. **Enhanced Accessibility:** Develop tailored CPD programs that address the specific needs and interests of pharmacists in diverse practice settings. Utilize online platforms and virtual learning modules to improve access, especially for pharmacists in remote or rural areas.
2. **Organizational Support:** Encourage healthcare institutions to prioritize CPD by allocating dedicated time, financial resources, and administrative support for pharmacists' professional development. Implement policies that recognize CPD as a core component of career progression and job satisfaction.
3. **Professional Collaboration:** Foster collaborative efforts between professional organizations, academic institutions, and healthcare providers to create interdisciplinary CPD opportunities. This could include joint workshops on emerging healthcare trends and collaborative research projects that integrate CPD into clinical practice.
4. **Advocacy and Awareness:** Advocate for policy changes that support CPD initiatives, including funding incentives for CPD participation and recognition of CPD credits towards professional licensing requirements. Raise awareness among stakeholders about the benefits of CPD in improving patient safety and healthcare outcomes.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study provides valuable insights into the impact of CPD on pharmacist practice and identifies critical factors that influence engagement with CPD. By addressing barriers and enhancing support

mechanisms, stakeholders can promote a culture of lifelong learning and professional growth within the pharmacy profession. Future research should focus on evaluating the long-term impact of CPD on patient outcomes and exploring innovative CPD strategies that meet the evolving needs of pharmacists in a dynamic healthcare landscape.

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Appendix: Semi-Structured Interview Questions

Section 1: Introduction and Background

1. Can you describe your current role and responsibilities as a pharmacist?
- Follow-up: How long have you been practicing as a pharmacist?
2. What role does continuing professional development (CPD) play in your professional life?
- Follow-up: How frequently do you engage in CPD activities?

Section 2: Perceived Impact of CPD

3. In what ways do you think CPD activities have influenced your clinical knowledge and skills?
- Follow-up: Can you provide specific examples of how CPD has impacted your practice?
4. How do you perceive the benefits of CPD in improving patient care and safety?
- Follow-up: Have you encountered any situations where CPD has directly influenced patient outcomes?

Section 3: Barriers to CPD Engagement

5. What are the main challenges you face in participating in CPD activities?
- Follow-up: How do these challenges affect your ability to engage with CPD?
6. How accessible do you find CPD resources and opportunities in your practice setting?
- Follow-up: Are there specific types of CPD activities that you find more accessible than others?

Section 4: Support and Resources for CPD

7. What type of support or resources do you think would enhance your participation in CPD?
- Follow-up: How can institutions or organizations better support pharmacists in their CPD efforts?
8. How important is organizational support, such as dedicated time and funding, for your CPD engagement?
- Follow-up: Have you experienced differences in CPD participation based on the support provided by your workplace?

Section 5: Motivation and Future Development

9. What motivates you to pursue CPD opportunities?
- Follow-up: How do you stay informed about new CPD opportunities and developments in pharmacy practice?
10. In your opinion, what are the future trends or areas of focus for CPD in pharmacy?
- Follow-up: How do you think CPD can evolve to better meet the needs of pharmacists and the healthcare system?

Section 6: Closing Questions

11. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experiences with CPD and its impact on your practice?
12. Do you have any suggestions for improving CPD programs or initiatives for pharmacists?