

Research Article

Maltese Radiographers' Attitudes towards Continuing Professional Development: An Initial Study Using Concept Maps

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: The Council for the Professions Complementary to Medicine in Malta recently published a draft document regarding the introduction of mandatory continuing professional development (CPD) for radiographers. This study explored the attitudes and motivators of Maltese radiographers prior to the implementation of mandatory CPD in order to provide the necessary information required by management to develop CPD successfully. Concept maps are used as part of a methodology to analyse qualitative data.

Methods: All radiographers working in the National Health Service were invited to complete an anonymous web-based questionnaire.

Results: The study showed that participants generally had a positive attitude towards CPD but were concerned about the mandatory aspect. The participants were mostly motivated by increasing professional knowledge, updating existing qualifications, and enhancing the status of the profession as a whole. Radiographers identified several difficulties with respect to CPD participation, such as lack of funding, lack of management support, and not enough local CPD opportunities. CPD participation was also negatively influenced by family commitments.

Conclusion: The study showed that the majority of radiographers were self-motivated to engage in CPD activities, but there were some concerns. Based on these results, the authors suggest recommendations for allaying apprehension and producing the necessary conditions for a successful mandatory CPD scheme.

Introduction

Continuing professional development (CPD) provides a vehicle for professionals to maintain and develop their knowledge, skills, and competences (KSC) [1], where

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RÉSUMÉ

Objet: Le Council of Professions Complimentary to Medicine (CPCM) de la République de Malte a publié récemment une ébauche sur la mise en place de la formation professionnelle continue (FPC) obligatoire pour les technologues en radiologie. L'étude examine les réactions et les motivations des technologues en radiologie du pays avant l'implantation de la FPC obligatoire pour recueillir les données nécessaires à la direction qui souhaite instaurer une FPC obligatoire réussie. On a utilisé les cartes conceptuelles dans la méthodologie d'analyse des données qualitatives.

Méthode: Tous les technologues en radiologie des services de santé nationaux ont été invités à répondre sans s'identifier à un questionnaire affiché sur le Web.

Résultats: L'étude a démontré que les participants se montraient plutôt positifs à l'égard de la FPC, mais qu'ils s'inquiétaient qu'on la rende obligatoire. Ils étaient avant tout motivés par l'augmentation des connaissances professionnelles, la mise à niveau des compétences et la hausse générale du niveau de la profession. Parmi les difficultés citées par les technologues en radiologie au sujet de la participation à la FPC, citons le manque de fonds, le manque d'appui de la direction, le manque de formations régionales. La participation à la FPC est aussi rendue difficile par les obligations familiales.

Conclusion: L'étude a démontré que la majorité des technologues en radiologie étaient motivés à participer à des activités de FPC, mais que certaines inquiétudes étaient présentes. À partir des résultats obtenus, les auteurs ont formulé des recommandations pour dissiper l'apprehension et produire les conditions nécessaires à une FPC obligatoire réussie.

“competences” includes the attributes of responsibility and autonomy in work and study situations as defined in the European Qualification Framework [2]. This implies that practitioners should assume responsibility in an autonomous manner for their professional practice and also for their own learning [3, 4]. A CPD program should be developed by individuals or groups of professionals through a learning needs self-assessment and implemented along the continuum of lifelong learning [5]. CPD signifies a process of continuous

improvement, initiated at the entry level to the profession and leading to an expert level in order to better serve society [6] and to improve their employability [7]. Health care professionals' autonomy and engagement in setting their own learning agenda is what differentiates CPD from continuous education [8], where learning outcomes and educational activities are planned by others. Although the autonomous participation in CPD has a voluntary aspect that may be interpreted by some health professionals as a personal decision to participate in or not, health professional councils lay down standards of practice in which members are to "embrace continuing education for optimal patient care, public education and enhanced knowledge and technical competence" [9]. The delivery of health care is concerned with quality and accountability. As health care organizations strive to develop their service portfolios, employees with direct customer contact must be endowed with the necessary competences to interact with their clients and technology. Often a new service fails because personnel have not been properly trained to sell and deliver the service [10].

In 2005, the United Kingdom became the first European country to introduce mandatory CPD participation as a prerequisite for radiographers to maintain registration. A preceding voluntary program that had been running for a number of years provided the Health Professions Council and the Society of Radiographers–United Kingdom with enough data to identify those resources that were necessary for a successful mandatory CPD process. Subsequently, the Health Professions Council set up a unique CPD framework based on standards to be achieved through a mixture of learning activities relevant to current and future practice, personal contribution to practice and service development, and assessed through a written portfolio of evidence. In addition, acknowledging that there are several approaches to CPD, the Health Professions Council determined that the portfolio of evidence should not be based on a specific number of credits or hours but the creation of a portfolio of reflective writing [11, 12].

On a Europe-wide level, the published literature on CPD within radiography is scarce and a comprehensive survey of the literature only identified one publication of note [13]. This study showed that the majority of European radiographers were in favor of CPD and introduced the possibility of a common Europe-wide CPD passport for radiography practitioners. Such a passport could be linked to a detailed European competence profile referenced directly to the European Qualification Framework. However, this study focussed only on the requirements necessary for the implementation of CPD in Europe, and the authors did not investigate the attitudes and motivators of European radiographers vis-à-vis mandatory CPD as a health policy for the maintenance of national registration. A study comparing UK radiographers with those in New Zealand indicated an ambivalent attitude to the implementation of mandatory CPD among UK radiographers [14].

In late 2010, the Council for the Professions Complementary to Medicine (CPCM) in Malta published a draft document proposing mandatory CPD for radiographers

and other health care professionals. In this draft, the CPCM recommended that radiographers be required to acquire a minimum of 45 CPD credits over a period of 3 years. These credits were to be selected from an approved list of activities from different categories, which included publication, self-directed learning, attendance at organized educational programs, and other professional activities (Society of Medical Radiographers–Malta, personal communication; email to J. Castillo, December 2010).

The great majority of radiographers in Malta work in the National Health Service (NHS), which includes two general hospitals, one oncology hospital, and four small health centres equipped with x-ray units. These radiologic services carry out 210,000 investigations per year and are coordinated through the medical imaging department located in the greater of the two general hospitals. Although this department does not have its own official CPD unit to monitor the KSC and learning needs of radiographers, evidence from the Society of Medical Radiographers–Malta and the Malta Magnetic Resonance Radiographers Group websites suggests that Maltese radiographers do participate in the CPD activities organized by these organizations. With the introduction of mandatory CPD, Maltese radiographers will be faced with the responsibility of identifying their learning needs and of planning their own professional development in a more structured way.

The aim of this study was to assess the situation regarding CPD attendance, attitudes and motivators among Maltese radiographers with respect to mandatory CPD prior to its implementation. The study would provide the Medical Imaging Department management with information to create communities of practice that would act as incubators for the development of staff expertise to a level consonant with the service quality targets of the organization [15, 16].

Methodology

The project was deemed to be a staff survey, and permission to conduct the study was sought from the Clinical Chair for Medical Imaging Services in Malta. The Manager for Medical Imaging Services was informed of the research project. A covering letter accompanied the questionnaire and assured participants that all responses would be treated with confidentiality and anonymity.

Design

A survey research strategy was adopted using a web-based questionnaire to collect data. This electronic collection of data was important to guarantee anonymity and confidentiality; this was particularly important so as to avoid response bias as the author holds a managerial position within the Medical Imaging Department. The survey began in December 2010 and was completed in January 2011.

A published questionnaire used in a similar study for nurses [5] was modified to be directed to radiographers. The

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