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Continuing Professional Development: an Interactive Tool for Enhancing the Skill Needs of Healthcare System in Nigeria

Aminu Bello Abdullahi Ph.D RN, RNE

**Katsina State College of Nursing Science,
Katsina, Katsina State, Nigeria
Email: belloaminu@gmail.com**

ABSTRACT

Continuing Professional Development (CPD) is a cornerstone of modern nursing practice, ensuring that nurses remain competent, adaptable, and responsive to the evolving needs of patients and healthcare systems. In Nigeria, where the healthcare sector faces challenges such as emerging diseases, technological advancements, and shifting patient expectations, CPD has become increasingly vital. This paper explores the role of CPD as an interactive tool for enhancing the skill needs of the Nigerian healthcare workforce. It reviews the structure of nursing education in Nigeria, the introduction of the Mandatory Continuing Professional Development Programme (MCPDP) by the Nursing and Midwifery Council of Nigeria, and the diverse forms of CPD, including structured, reflective, and self-directed learning. Evidence from literature demonstrates that CPD improves patient outcomes, enhances professional competence, fosters motivation, and reduces healthcare costs. The paper further emphasizes the importance of participatory and simulation-based learning, particularly in the post-COVID-19 era, as a means of strengthening professional practice. Ultimately, CPD is presented as both a professional obligation and a transformative strategy for advancing nursing practice and improving the quality of healthcare delivery in Nigeria.

Keywords : Professional development, interactive tool, skill needs, healthcare system.

INTRODUCTION

Nursing is fundamentally about providing quality care to patients. As patients' needs evolve, nurses must continually acquire new skills to respond effectively. The emergence of new diseases, novel therapies, and innovative technologies further underscores the need for continuous learning. Research findings are regularly published on improved clinical procedures, making it essential for nurses to remain updated.

Continuing Professional Development (CPD), also referred to as Continuing Education (CE), is therefore a lifelong process that ensures healthcare professionals maintain and enhance their knowledge and skills. In many jurisdictions, CPD is mandatory, requiring nurses to engage in structured professional development relevant to their practice areas.

Evidence shows that CPD improves the quality of nursing care, enhances patient safety, increases nurse satisfaction, and reduces healthcare costs (Mónica et al., 2021). Commitment to CPD enables nurses to deliver safe, effective, and high-quality care (Cooper, 2009). Furthermore, nurses and midwives must acquire and maintain specialized knowledge to provide skilled care and demonstrate competence to the public, employers, and the profession throughout their careers (Moetsana-Poka, 2014).

NURSING EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

In Nigeria, nursing education is offered through two main pathways:

1. Colleges/Schools of Nursing and hospital-based schools: A three-year programme leading to the award of the Registered Nurse (RN) professional certificate. However, these institutions do not issue legally recognized academic certificates.

2. Universities: A five-year programme leading to the award of the Bachelor of Nursing Science (BNSc) degree, alongside RN and Registered Midwife (RM) certifications.

After initial licensing, nurses are required to renew their licenses every three years, during which they must attend at least one continuing education programme. Unfortunately, these programmes are often concentrated in urban centres, forcing nurses in rural areas to travel long distances and incur additional costs for transport and accommodation (Nsemio et al., 2013).

A major challenge with the basic nursing programme in Colleges/Schools of Nursing is the absence of legally backed academic certificates. Graduates receive only a testimonial from their institution and a professional license from the Nursing and Midwifery Council of Nigeria (NMCN). This limitation arises because, under the National Policy on Education, only institutions regulated by the National Universities Commission (NUC), National Board for Technical Education (NBTE), or National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) are authorized to issue academic certificates.

To address this gap, the NMCN mandated the transition of nursing education into Colleges of Nursing in collaboration with the NBTE. This reform aligns nursing education with the National Policy on Education, granting legal authority for the award of academic certificates. The newly introduced ND/HND Nursing programme is a four-year uninterrupted course designed to ensure seamless academic progression while aligning with the new scheme of service for nurses approved by the National Council of Establishment in 2016.

CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT (CPD)

CPD is a lifelong process of active participation by nurses in learning activities that help them develop and maintain competence, enhance professional practice, and achieve career goals (Pool et al., 2013). Broadly, CPD encompasses both formal and informal continuing education and learning, resulting in the acquisition and transfer of knowledge and skills necessary for maintaining licensure and competent practice (Hegney et al., 2010).

According to the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland (NMBI, 2022), examples of CPD activities include:

- Formal education programmes
- Reflective practice
- Journal clubs and case conferences
- Clinical supervision and learning sets
- Preceptorship and mentorship
- Workshops, seminars, and conferences
- Distance learning, blended learning, and e-learning
- Independent study and self-directed learning

Types of Continuing Professional Development

BPP (2020) identifies three main types of CPD:

1. **Structured CPD (Active Learning):**
 - Interactive and participatory in nature.
 - Includes training courses, workshops, conferences, seminars, lectures, and e-learning.
 - May also involve career-oriented assessments and examinations.
2. **Reflective CPD (Passive Learning):**
 - One-directional and non-interactive.
 - Examples include reading professional articles, case studies, industry updates, or listening to podcasts.
 - Some informal meetings also fall into this category.

3. **Self-Directed CPD (Unstructured Learning):**

- Unsupervised and individually driven.
- Includes reading peer-reviewed journals, books, trade magazines, and industry-specific news sources.

NURSING CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

In 2010, the Nursing and Midwifery Council of Nigeria (NMCN), in line with its regulatory mandate, introduced the Mandatory Continuing Professional Development Programme (MCPDP). The programme aims to:

- Regularly update practitioners in line with evolving healthcare needs.
- Maintain continuity in professional education and practice.
- Meet the needs of healthcare teams, employers, and society.
- Respond to emerging diseases, new drugs, and increasing public awareness.
- Set and uphold professional standards (NMCN, 2012).

Participation in MCPDP is tied to license renewal. Nurses are required to complete a minimum of five days of learning activities every three years before re-licensure.

Garba (2011) identified several reasons for introducing MCPDP, including:

- Limited engagement of nurses with professional literature.
- Changing disease patterns and healthcare technologies.
- New approaches to care and emerging drugs.
- Increasing patient awareness and evolving client needs.
- The need for quality assurance and professionalism in nursing.

It was expected that MCPDP would address deficiencies in nursing practice, improve leadership, and strengthen the quality of care (Garba, 2011; Nsemo et al., 2013).

Enhancing Skill Needs of the Nigerian Healthcare System through CPD

For CPD to be effective, it must involve **interactive and participatory learning**, whether in physical or virtual environments. CPD serves as a vital tool for enhancing the skill needs of Nigeria's healthcare system.

Motivations for CPD (Whyte et al., 2000):

- Improved patient care
- Intellectual challenge and professional growth
- Updating knowledge and skills
- Demonstrating competence
- Peer recognition and approval
- Reducing risk of litigation
- Preparing for new roles and career advancement
- Meeting employer and regulatory requirements

At the University of Nigeria Teaching Hospital, the primary motivation for nurses' participation in MCPDP was to develop the proficiency required to meet patients' expectations (Ingwu, 2019). Furthermore, principles of CPD can be applied beyond professional practice to patient education, empowering families and caregivers (Sachdeva, 2016).

Benefits of Continuing Professional Development

- **Personal and Professional Growth:** CPD supports continuous skill development, role adaptation, and confidence building (Du Boulay, 1999).
- **Up-skilling and Adaptability:** It provides a comprehensive view of an individual's competencies, enabling refinement of existing skills and acquisition of new ones.
- **Career Advancement:** CPD offers tangible evidence of motivation and development, useful for appraisals and job applications (BPP, 2020).
- **Progression to Mastery:** With appropriate motivation and effective CPD interventions, individuals can progress from proficiency to expertise and mastery (Sachdeva, 2016).

Emerging Trends in Continuing Professional Development

The COVID-19 Pandemic highlighted the need for digital and simulation-based CPD. Simulation-based learning can address both individual competencies (e.g., procedural skills, decision-making) and team-based competencies, leading to improved performance outcomes.

To sustain excellence in nursing education and practice, the NMCN should:

- Champion the establishment of Consultant Nurse/Midwife **roles and the** Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) pathway.
- Phase out part-time and online nursing degree programmes, as their objectives have been achieved. Notably, other medical and allied health professions in Nigeria do not rely on part-time or distance learning modes.

CONCLUSION

Continuing Professional Development (CPD) is an indispensable tool for nurses in ensuring the delivery of high-quality patient care and in meeting the evolving needs of the Nigerian healthcare system. By fostering lifelong learning, CPD enables professionals to attain and sustain competence, adapt to emerging challenges, and respond effectively to advances in healthcare. Beyond individual growth, CPD has the potential to drive transformational changes in nursing performance, thereby improving patient outcomes and strengthening the overall healthcare system. To achieve these goals, CPD should emphasize interactive learning experiences, participatory approaches, and the efficient utilization of available resources.

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