QUICK TIPS

Needs Assessment

For presenters and planning committee members of Mainpro+® certified programs and events

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2630 Skymark Avenue, Mississauga ON L4W 5A4
905 629-0900 Fax 1 888 843-2372 www.cfpc.ca
The goal of continuing professional development is to improve patient outcomes by changing the practice behaviours of physicians. Evidence has demonstrated that CPD programs that are based on well-conceived and well-conducted needs assessments are more effective in changing physician behaviour.¹

Needs assessment is the process of gathering information to identify the learning needs of the target audience. The needs assessment must identify the current state of the target group’s knowledge/competence/performance areas and identify gaps in those areas. The most useful needs assessments are those where multiple methods are used to identify educational needs linked to improvement in patient care.

There are different types of learning needs. They can be:

1. Self-recognized, or perceived needs: I know what I want and need to know.
2. Unknown to the learner, or unperceived needs: I don’t know what I don’t know.
3. Miscalculated, or misperceived needs: I think I know something that I don’t.
4. Emergent needs: Now I have some new information, I realize I want or need to learn something else instead of or in addition to what I am learning now.²

The more you are able to learn about your target audience and what their everyday problems in practice are in relation to the topic you wish to deliver, the more effective your program will be and the more likely a change in practice behaviour will occur.

Different methods are used to determine the different types of learning needs. Here are some possible strategies for defining learning needs:³

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perceived needs</th>
<th>Unperceived needs</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Survey</td>
<td>Knowledge test</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>Chart audit</td>
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<td>Focus group interview</td>
<td>Critical incident reports</td>
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<tr>
<td>Key informant</td>
<td>Duplicate prescription/health care diary</td>
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<td>Representative planning committee</td>
<td>Expert advisory group</td>
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<tr>
<td>Meetings with colleagues (formal or informal)</td>
<td>Patient feedback</td>
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<tr>
<td>Evaluation of previous CPD activity</td>
<td>Direct observation of practice performance</td>
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Identification and analysis of CPD needs provide the basis for developing educational objectives. The planning committee should ask the following questions:

- How common is the need among the target audience?
- How many different assessment sources indicated this need?
- How significantly will the unfulfilled learning need hinder health care delivery?
- How directly is the need related to actual physician performance?
- How likely is it that a CPD activity will improve practice behaviour?
- Are sufficient resources available to effectively address this topic?
- How receptive will the target audience be to a session on this topic?

Your needs assessment submission for Mainpro+® certification should show how the educational needs were determined (identify resources and references used; e.g., quality improvement data, chart audits, physician surveys, clinical guidelines, CanMEDS-FM competencies addressed, etc.) and desired outcomes (at what level you want your target audience to perform). Then you must define the learning objectives that will help close the learning gap you have identified via the needs assessment process.


REFERENCES