



VETERINARY COUNCIL
OF NEW ZEALAND
Te Kaitiaki Take Kōwhiri o Aotearoa

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New Continuing Professional Development Requirements

The Veterinary Council's new continuing professional development (CPD) framework takes effect from 1 April 2011.

The Veterinarians Act, 2005, requires the Veterinary Council to protect the public interest by ensuring that veterinarians are competent and fit to practise on an ongoing basis. The right to practise is recertified each year through the issue of a practising certificate. Before issuing practising certificates the Council must be satisfied that veterinarians meet the minimum practising standards of the Act, which now include participation in CPD activities.

Continuing professional development is your involvement in a range of activities to maintain and enhance your performance in your chosen area of practice. Commitment to lifelong learning, reflective practice and quality assurance activities are central to maintaining competence, enhancing performance and ensuring the public can expect high professional standards.

For the issue of a practising certificate in 2014 and thereafter, you will be required to declare, and if necessary demonstrate, your level of involvement over the previous three years in CPD activities aimed at maintaining and enhancing your competence and performance.

Our records show that the vast majority of veterinarians are actively engaging in continuing professional development, with most well exceeding the previous recommended level of participation. As such the new system is a formalisation and recognition of the investment veterinarians already make to quality improvement.

For most veterinarians, compulsory CPD will not require any more activity than they are already undertaking. However, there is a minority for whom adequate CPD will be a new activity and it is this group that is at the greatest risk of failing to maintain essential competencies.

Sufficient flexibility has been built into the new CPD framework to allow all veterinarians to meet the requirements. We recognise that veterinarians practise in a variety of contexts. Therefore the framework should be viewed as context driven, with veterinarians relating CPD activities to their areas of practice.

Background

The Council, for the last 11 years, has required veterinarians to report on their CPD activities in their annual practising certificate applications. The CPD guidelines which were introduced at that time recommended, but did not require, veterinarians to accumulate a minimum of 60 CPD points over three years of which at least 15 must be in 'structured' activities (i.e. activities with specific outcomes that can be assessed and verified).

Although CPD has not been compulsory, failing to keep up-to-date is taken into account when concerns about veterinarians' competence or conduct arise.

The profession and stakeholders were advised, in late 2008, of the Council's decision to require all veterinarians to participate in relevant CPD activities in order to be eligible for the issue of an annual practising certificate. In making this decision the Council took into account the New Zealand Veterinary Association's submission that CPD should be a mandatory component of ongoing registration, the compulsory CPD requirements in place for other NZ regulated professions, and the public's expectation that veterinarians are working within such a framework

A joint Council, NZVA, VetLearn, Massey and MAF working party, developed the proposed new framework, which was provided to the profession and stakeholders for comment in August 2010.

Issues arising out of the consultation process

Thank you to all those who took the time to comment on the proposals. There was a great response to the consultation document, with feedback generally positive.

Some who replied wanted proof that "requiring a set target of CPD points assures competence". The system is not intended to provide this. However there is evidence that CPD activity, as broadly defined, is associated with the maintenance and development of professional competency. Practising in isolation has been identified as a significant risk factor in poor performance and engaging in reflective practice is associated with improvements in the quality of care and personal and professional growth. Hence the emphasis of the new framework on these areas.

Currently there is no strong evidence that moving from a voluntary to a compulsory system will result in measurable improvements in competency. However such a system will help assure public confidence and provides a mechanism to identify and target remedial action towards those veterinarians who may be at risk of not maintaining competence.

The CPD points system has been transferred from the previous voluntary framework. Vets are familiar with this and, based on our experience, want detail on what they need to do to meet requirements. However the system is flexible and will recognise the particular circumstances of individuals and employing organisations. Failure to meet the specific points or category requirements will not be an issue if the veterinarian is able to demonstrate that they have maintained standards, albeit through other means.

The Council recognises that employers have a major role in assuring the competence of their employees. The CPD framework is not intended to supersede this role. We will

therefore be working with the MAF Verification Agency and any other larger employers who approach us, on ways to recognise/harmonise their existing CPD programmes and recording systems with our requirements. The emphasis is on enhancing performance, which the Council recognises can be achieved through ways other than strict adherence to the detailed requirements of its CPD framework.

In finalising the new framework we have also taken on board the need to provide greater clarity on the very wide ambit of “acceptable” CPD activities. Veterinarians have considerable flexibility in deciding what activities to undertake to maintain and enhance their knowledge and skills. The over-riding principle is that the activity is relevant to, and contributes to maintaining or enhancing veterinarians’ competence in their current or future role.

Research in the medical field indicates that the most effective medical education for doctors is based on their own work environment and individual practice. Under the new framework some veterinarians may choose to meet their CPD obligations via traditional means such as attending conferences. Others will be able to do so by incorporating and recording, for example, online learning opportunities, work-based training and peer-to-peer learning into their day-to-day practice.

The new CPD framework

The Council is prescribing, by Notice in the 31/3/11 edition of the New Zealand Gazette, participation in Continuing Professional Development (CPD) as a minimum practising standard for the issue of an Annual Practising Certificate (APC).

The main features of the new framework are:

- classification of CPD activities into three categories:
 - o continuing veterinary education (CVE): e.g. conferences, workshops, assessed online learning, in-house seminars, studying towards a qualification, giving presentations, peer-reviewed publications and refereeing
 - o collegial learning activity (CLA): e.g. in-house training, peer discussion and review activities, supervision and mentoring, journal and study groups, case presentations, QA activities, online discussion forums, and those parts of CVE and self-directed activities that involve interactive peer-to-peer learning
 - o self-directed learning (SDL): e.g. reading and research, online learning, online discussion forums, case/procedure/topic research and review, publications, CPD planning, learning diaries
- a broad interpretation of what counts as CPD – provided it has relevance to, and benefits the veterinarian’s work
- more emphasis on interactive collegial activities, online learning and self reflection
- a requirement to accumulate at least 60 relevant CPD points over three years, a minimum of 15 points being in each of the Collegial Learning Activity and Continuing Veterinary Education areas
- the first 3-year cycle starting on 1 April 2011
- CPD records being kept

- veterinarians declaring their CPD points, in each of the three categories, annually in the first two years and from 2014 onwards providing a declaration that they have met the CPD requirements relevant to their area(s) of practice over the previous three years
- compliance monitoring. The first audits will be carried out in the first quarter of 2014 and will assess CPD undertaken between 1 April 2011 and 31 December 2013 (on a prorated basis of 2.75 years). The form of the compliance monitoring system is currently being developed. Random selection for audit may be supplemented by targeted selection if evidence based and defensible risk criteria can be identified. Reduced rates of, or exemption from, audit requirements may also be considered in circumstances where the Council is satisfied that veterinarians or their employers are subject to existing robust audits of continuing professional development activities by external parties.

Further information and detail is set out in the document "*Continuing Professional Development – Guidance for Veterinarians*". This is currently being finalised and an electronic copy will be provided to veterinarians within the next fortnight. Hard copies will be available on request from the Council office.

The Future

The CPD framework will be reviewed at least every three years and the Council will keep a close watch on developments, in NZ and overseas, on other ways to maintain and enhance professional standards.

In other NZ professions, those seeking to renew their practising certificates must meet not only minimum continuing education requirements but also other requirements such as clinical audit and peer review (in the medical sector) or compliance with certain defined professional standards (in the dental sector).

Dentists must declare that they have met relevant standards, such as infection control, informed consent and record keeping as part of their annual practising certificate application and there is compliance monitoring of this declaration.

The Medical Council is currently introducing practice visits as part of, or as an alternative to, continuing professional development requirements.

The Council considers that these are areas worthy of consideration and has asked its Professional Standards Committee to investigate and report back.

Please don't hesitate to contact the Council Registrar if you have any questions.



Ron Gibson
VCNZ Chair