

The principles governing continuing professional development (CPD) of medical practitioners in a remote or rural setting.

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All practitioners must maintain and improve their knowledge and skills through a process of CPD if they are to remain safe and effective. The educational needs of a practitioner in a remote or rural setting are different from those of a practitioner in a major centre. Rural practice is characterised by the need to maintain the ability to manage a wide range of conditions which present infrequently in contrast to the increasing tendency in urban practice for the development of expertise in a restricted range of conditions which are the practitioner sees frequently. The maintenance of infrequently used clinical skills may be a particular problem. In remote areas the problems of CPD may be compounded by professional isolation.

Kolb suggests that learning is based on reflection on experience. This reflection should lead to the identification of learning needs. Adult learning theory proposes that individuals determine their personal learning needs and on this basis select appropriate learning activities. These assumptions underlie much of our approach to continued professional development but are an inadequate description of how professional learning takes place. Concepts of situated learning such as Vygotsky's *Zone of Proximal Development* and Lave and Wagner's *Communities of Learning* emphasise the role of mentoring and shared experiences in learning. Schon suggests that mentoring improves reflection and so facilitates learning.

Effective solutions for CPD for rural and remote practitioners must recognise these principles. Formal structured programmes however they are delivered will be less effective than programmes which allow immediate update and review on clinical problems as they arise. Peer mentoring encourages reflection and thus the identification of learning needs and can take place electronically. Telemedicine is not only of potential benefit to the patient but is an immediate form of CPD.