

## **OTBA CPD CATEGORY 2 : INFORMAL LEARNING ACTIVITIES**

Research has shown that adults learn best when seeking knowledge to answer a question that has been raised for them or when they wish to learn more about a particular area of interest. This informal learning is that learning that derives from one's own personal study, reading or other individual activity. For example: you may wish to learn all you can about the intervention with a particular disorder, you may wish to update yourself in recent research in relation to a clinical condition you see from time to time, you might have a patient who is not responding in the way most patients do and so you seek to find out why.

### **What activities constitute informal learning?**

Informal learning includes reading, listening to recorded programs such as university lectures, watching video educational materials, web based learning, database searches, structured learning projects, quality improvement reviews and others to be described.

#### Reading

Reading, from a CPD point of view, includes the reading of and reflection on a journal article, book or other reading material, critically appraising a journal article, or researching and reading around a particular topic. Your reading should be recorded so that the reference is cited and then your thoughts and reflections noted about the material you have read and where possible, its reference to your work as an occupational therapist.

Critically appraising a journal article or a topic/practice area is a formal process and should be followed through to the posting stage to ensure you derive the most benefit from the activity. Further information is below but can also be found on the website, <http://www.otcats.com/>

Similarly, listening to or watching recorded material should be formally recorded and your reflections and learning noted. Taking the time to reflect on what you are hearing or seeing is important to retaining the information and to linking it to your practice.

#### Private study projects

A private study project can pull together a number of informal learning activities by linking them to the aim of the project. It involves the identification of a specific and substantial learning need and the development of a plan to meet that need. For example, the plan for learning a new therapy skill may include literature research, training in the skill and a quality assurance activity to assess your performance of the new skill. Further information is provided below.

#### Quality Improvement Activities

Private study projects also include quality improvement or practice improvement projects. Quality improvement projects can include a wide range of activities relevant to your practice. For example, it might be a simple review of outcomes or a more in-depth review of a particular intervention program, where you look at your patient's results after treatment with the aim of seeing that you are achieving the outcomes you want.

### **Recording time spent in informal learning activities**

Whatever learning you undertake and however you do it, you will need to record it to meet the CPD Registration Standard. It is important that the purpose of the informal learning activity is recorded to demonstrate how the activity contributes to the development and extension of your competence.

## PRIVATE STUDY AND QUALITY PROJECTS

### What is a project?

Adults learn best through a process of discovery, coming to the new information following a desire to better understand a problem or puzzle confronting them or just following up a point of interest. This problem, puzzle or point of interest can pop-up during practice, can be triggered by a presentation or journal article, or by a discussion with a colleague, or may result from a moment of reflection on one's practice, reading or attendance at an educational meeting.

Self-directed learning or private study and quality improvement projects may include, for example, activities that are part of a research project, or part of a workplace project such as: developing clinical practice guidelines, participating in a multidisciplinary peer review group, collecting data on an aspect of clinical practice in order to review this aspect in relation to recognised standards or protocols. These projects can be undertaken by an individual or by a group but they need to have clear aims and goals and expected outcomes as well as built in evaluation. They may have a purely educational focus or they may lean more towards quality improvement.

Whatever their focus these projects need to incorporate some reflection on the way the project contributes to your work as an occupational therapist and how it has improved your performance or competence.

### What constitutes an aim?

An aim is what you wish to find out. For example your aim may be to update your knowledge of depression management, or you may wish to know how your patients or clients manage following your interventions that aimed to assist them manage their depression.

### What are learning goals?

Learning goals are whatever activities are necessary for you to achieve your aim.

Your learning goals for these examples could be to:

- identify the most recent advances in depression. For example, this may include the role of counselling and personal development activities; advances in neurological physiology or the evidence supporting occupationally based interventions.
- determine how to achieve this learning - reading journals, talking with experts, participating in a CD-ROM program on depression, Internet courses, Internet based journals.
- incorporate this knowledge into your overall understanding of the occupational therapy contribution to depression management
- determine the effect any new knowledge will have on your management of depression
- modify your practice, if necessary, based on your new knowledge

### How can I achieve these goals?

You can reach your goals by taking a step-by-step approach. In the depression example:

*Step 1:* Aims and methods – the first learning goal directs your reading into particular area/s, eg use of sensory modulation, neurological and social causes of depression or new pharmacological agents

*Step 2:* Analysis and Interpretation – the second learning goal represents the analysis and interpretation of this reading particularly in relation to any new procedures

*Step 3:* Application – the third learning goal requires the application of this new knowledge to your practice

*Step 4:* Outcome – the fourth learning goal is the outcome or changed behaviour brought about by steps 1-3. This is the most important aspect of a structured learning approach as

reflecting on the outcome may bring about a change in the way you administer your intervention.

To earn CPD credit, it is important for you to record your aim, cite the methods you used to achieve your goals, the dates and time expended. The attached form will assist you in maintaining a record of this activity.

### **CRITICALLY APPRAISED PAPERS AND TOPICS**

Critically Appraised Topic, or CAT, is a short summary of evidence on a topic of interest, usually focused around a clinical question. A CAT is like a shorter and less rigorous version of a systematic review, summarising the best available research evidence on a topic. Usually more than one study is included in a CAT. When professionals summarise a single study, the outcome is a critically appraised paper, or CAP. CATs and CAPs are one way for busy practitioners to collate and share their appraisals. CATs are also increasingly being used as a university assignment to assess student's skill and knowledge.

The process of reviewing the evidence and compiling an appraisal provides a valuable learning opportunity for the reviewer. It is a different way of formalising a private study project and how you choose to record your activity is up to you.

The website ([www.otcats.com](http://www.otcats.com)) contains CATs and CAPs focusing on occupational therapy interventions as well as information on how to post your CAP or CAT. The template provided on the website is used for posting your work but the report form below can be used to capture the PD aspects of the exercise.

### **Useful Resources:**

There are two publications from the NSW Department of Health that are very useful. "The Clinician's Toolkit for improving quality in health care" and the "Easy Guide to Clinical Practice Improvement" can both be downloaded from their website - [www.health.nsw.gov.au/policies/pd/2007/pdf/PD2007\\_080.pdf](http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/policies/pd/2007/pdf/PD2007_080.pdf) or ordered from the Better Health Centre (free of charge) on +61 2 (02) 9816 0452 or fax +61 2 (02) 9816 0492. (These are old publications now but they can still be useful)

### **Some occupational therapy specific references on quality improvement**

Lockwood, K. (2006) The clinician's role in promoting improvement and change  
*Australian Occupational Therapy Journal*, 53, p59

Mickan, S. and Rodger, S. (2002) Quality activities: Utilising evidence and informing clinical research  
*Australian Occupational Therapy Journal*, 49, pp93–99

Alsop, A. (2000) *Continuing Professional Development in Healthcare*. Oxford, UK : Blackwell Science.

### **Reporting projects**

The following form can be used as a template for recording private study, and quality improvement projects.

## Informal Learning Reflection Form

Name	Date	Registration No
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Activity (eg. learning project, quality improvement project, literature review)	CPD Category	Hours Claimed

This activity has been prompted by my need to learn about

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How was this activity carried out?

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How was this activity evaluated in terms of meeting the goals?

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How was this activity evaluated in terms of contribution to occupational therapy practice?

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References for follow-up

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Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_