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QUICK TIPS

Needs Assessment

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

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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

Perceived needs	Unperceived needs
Survey	Knowledge test
Interview	Chart audit
Focus group interview	Critical incident reports
Key informant	Duplicate prescription/health care diary
Representative planning committee	Expert advisory group
Meetings with colleagues (formal or informal)	Patient feedback
Evaluation of previous CPD activity	Direct observation of practice performance

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.



USEFUL LINKS AND NEEDS ASSESSMENT SAMPLES

- The College of Family Physicians of Canada. *CanMEDS-Family Medicine 2017: A competency framework for family physicians across the continuum*. Mississauga, ON: The College of Family Physicians of Canada; 2017. Available from www.cfpc.ca/canmedsfm. Accessed 2018 Jan 5.
- Wright State University Boonshoft School of Medicine. Continuing medical education: needs assessment guidelines. www.med.wright.edu/fca/cme/needs. Accessed 2015 April 20.
- University of Florida College of Medicine. *Continuing medical education: practice gap and educational needs assessment samples*. Available from: <http://cme.ufl.edu/forms/na-samples>. Accessed 2015 April 20.
- Faculty of Medicine, Office of Continuing Professional Development. *Quick Tips: Conducting a Gap Analysis*. Toronto, ON: University of Toronto; 2016. Available from: www.cpd.utoronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/P04-How-to-Conduct-a-Gap-Analysis.pdf. Accessed 2017 October 3.
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1. Fox RD, Bennet NL. Learning and change: implications for continuing medical education. *BMJ* 1998;316(7129):466-468.
2. Grant J. Learning needs assessment: assessing the need. *BMJ* 2002;324(7330):156-159.
3. Moore DE Jr, Green JS, Gallis, HA. Achieving desired results and improved outcomes: integrating planning and assessment throughout learning activities. *J Contin Educ Health Prof* 2009;29(1):1-15.