

making the case

The impact on the compliance of recording CPD activity following the introduction of an eportfolio within a professional membership organisation.

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Theme(s)

Teaching/Professional practice: Continuing Professional Development

The background context

The Society of Chiropodists and Podiatrists (SCP) is a professional body and Trade Union for Chiropodists and Podiatrist who are registered with the Health Professions Council (HPC). Entry to the profession is at degree level; however the organisation does have affiliate membership for Podiatry Assistants and Technicians. The Health Professions Council Order 2001, which introduced mandatory Continuing Professional Development (CPD) to the profession from 2003, required all Podiatrists to maintain an up to date record of their CPD activity which they could submit for inspection if called to do so by the HPC.

Why PebblePad?

The Society has been able to provide members with a flexible, cost effective system for recording CPD. The existing tool on the Society's members' area of their website only allows members to list CPD in terms of course attendance. PebblePad has provided a platform on which members can build and personalise a detailed framework of their CPD activity and organise it in such a way that it can be submitted to the HPC if the member should be called for the bi-annual CPD Audit. The HPC CPD standards are central to the way CPD is captured in that it encourages participation in a wide range of CPD, while having reflection as a central part of the recording process. Both these factors have been integral objectives of the implementation of an eportfolio to the SCP as a professional membership organisation and Trade Union.

The purpose

By introducing PebblePad to the SCP the Union Learning Fund project team were aiming to achieve at least 90% of members having a portfolio which could demonstrate compliance with the HPC standards for CPD and to give members greater awareness of the importance and need to participate in reflective practice as an integral part of their CPD. The project aimed to provide empirical evidence to the governing council of the SCP to demonstrate the potential value of using an eportfolio such as PebblePad. In addition, the project aimed to increase the level of confidence and use of information communication technology (ICT) by the membership.

The approach

The Union Learning Fund project team set up a pilot of the use of PebblePad. After identifying the need for an eportfolio and scoping the project, 500 licences were distributed to members via a network of Union Learning Representatives (ULRs) who represent, promote and help members address their learning needs within National Health Service (NHS) organisations as well as Private Practice. Before issuing licences, members were asked about their current methods of recording CPD, and their attitude and confidence in ICT. They were also questioned about their expectations and predicted barriers to using PebblePad. The licences were issued to groups of members, i.e. NHS Podiatry departments or groups of Branch members. All those who were issued with a licence in the pilot needed to have access to a ULR, as the training and support would be cascaded via the Union Learning Fund team to the ULRs. The ULR would then act as a trainer and mentor.

The result

A total number of 471 licences were issued during stage one of the project. Questionnaires were sent by email to all those who were issued a licence. A total number of 228 questionnaires were received back, giving a response rate of 48%.

12 months after using PebblePad a second questionnaire was sent to only those who responded to the first questionnaire. This was done using the Survey Monkey web based questionnaire tool, to both streamline the administrative processes as well as make analysis easier.

A fundamental question of this survey was to identify the number of members who had a CPD portfolio in place:

- 31% of respondents to the first questionnaire said they 'currently have a system in place to record their CPD'.
- 3% use the SCP web based CPD recorder.

After using PebblePad for one year:

- 13% use PebblePad as their only system.
- 46% use PebblePad, but back-up with a paper based system.
- 4% continue to "stuff paper records into a box or file."

After the implementation of PebblePad the number of members reporting to have a CPD recording system in place rose from 31% of responders to 92%.

When we asked about ICT confidence prior to PebblePad use:

- 43% said they were confident or very confident.
- 47% OK.
- 9% will have a go, or needed support.

After using PebblePad for 12 months:

- 15% said they were more confident in using ITC.

Before using PebblePad the main perceived barrier to use was reported as a lack of time, either at home or work. After holding PebblePad licences for one year, 57% reported that their main barrier to use was a lack of time at home and/or work.

The impact

- The introduction of an eportfolio to a membership organisation increased the membership awareness of CPD and reflective practice, with a large increase in the number of members who had a CPD system in place.
- There was a small increase in the number of members who reported that their confidence in using information communication technology had improved.
- Anecdotal evidence showed that PebblePad has become popular with members. An example of this was where members from Wales, who were prevented from taking part in the pilot due to funding restrictions, approached the Society via the Delegate Assembly to ask the Society if all areas of membership could have access to the system.
- The Faculty of Podiatric Surgery is assessing the potential to use PebblePad for an assessment tool within their professional training process.

Lessons learnt

Despite CPD being a mandatory part of professional registration, CPD continues to be a low priority for members, with recording of actual CPD activity in any format an even greater problem. Time pressures are the most prominent reason given by members for not involving themselves in the recording of activity via PebblePad. This was enhanced during the project due to the implementation of the Health and Social Care Bill which was to fundamentally change the way the NHS services are managed and delivered. This organisational change impacted members workload and motivation.

At a mid-way stage in the project it was revealed that only 69% had accessed their account and only 24% were actively using their accounts or had used them in the last 3 months. An in-depth look revealed that some members failed to receive their login details because the email generated by PebblePad was rejected by their server/computer firewall. This continues to be a problem for members who give NHS email addresses. This problem should have been followed up at the initial licence allocation stage, as it did prevent licencees from accessing the system.

Lack of training opportunities for PebblePad users was identified to be a major barrier to use. More PebblePad training was required by many members. The initial plan was to train ULRs to use the system, and then they would cascade training to their colleagues. Unfortunately this system was not as successful as hoped due to the lack of ICT confidence shown by some ULRs. Also, many ULRs found that they were not able to take time off to attend PebblePad training due to staff shortages in the NHS.

Overall an emphasis needs to be placed on support at the licence issue stage, to ensure that licencees activate their account as soon as they receive their login passwords. This needs to be backed up with at least one training session and access to a mentor to encourage, support and provide on-going training where required.

Ultimately, however, the inactivity around the use of PebblePad could be symptomatic of the profession's attitude to recording CPD and reflective practice. It identifies a major need by members for the SCP to provide more support, guidance and resources to help them ensure meaningful and worthwhile CPD is undertaken across all sections of the profession.

In brief – making the case for PebblePad

- PebblePad can provide professional membership organisations with a low cost solution to assist members with recording and storing CPD, which can be easily accessed and used across the profession.
- The use of PebblePad can provide a tool to help members with poor ICT skills gain confidence and provide a platform for them to 'have a go' at using ICT.
- The reflective platform used by PebblePad allows the user to participate in reflective practice and can help make it part of the routine CPD recording process.