

CPD for orthotists & orthotic technicians in the UK

The trustees of the OETT invited around 30 representative stakeholders in postgraduate professional development for orthotists to a meeting on the 22nd May 2007. The aim of was to consider the training needs of orthotists and orthotic technicians, and how these needs might best be met. The meeting was convened to facilitate discussion amongst orthotists, technicians and their employers with providers of short courses and training opportunities. The programme involved two sessions; brief details of the programme are posted on the OETT website (www.oett.org.uk). The first session comprised a series of short presentations by orthotists, technicians and those responsible for training staff in NHS and commercial organisations. The second session comprised presentations from individuals, companies and organisations delivering postgraduate training opportunities. Several themes were repeated in presentations which are outlined below.

Training needs

The training needs of orthotists depend heavily on their stage of career; for instance, in the period after graduation there was a need for ‘on the job’ mentorship. When making the transition from graduate to competent clinician orthotists have to develop generic competencies in time management, communication and interpersonal skills as well as the key technical skills in making footwear and other commonly prescribed orthoses.

However, a few years after qualifying, orthotists then sought training over and above the basic knowledge taught at undergraduate level and this was often harder to find. Several specialist courses run on techniques for designing spinal orthoses or orthoses for cerebral palsy for instance were perceived not to offer training above the basic level. Training for more experienced orthotists might not be didactically delivered and instead reflect upon ‘real-world’ scenarios leading to changes in clinical practice. Some training might perhaps be better delivered in a multidisciplinary context to teams of people who routinely work together. Experienced orthotists often sought training in research skills and the core competencies of extended role practitioners.

As well as recognising personal knowledge gaps and learning needs, motivation is required to seek out and make the most of opportunities; some participants acknowledged apathy amongst colleagues. One of the barriers to all training is that taking time out for these activities creates difficulties for employers; whilst recognising the necessity for CPD contracts require staff in clinics; employers are reluctant to incur loss on continuity and the costs associated with locum cover.

Training opportunities

The NCTEPO at Strathclyde University has run a series of short courses for several years; three or four of these continue to be popular with 10-20 orthotists attending each year. However some orthotists reported difficulty taking time off clinics to attend. Similarly it has been a challenge to recruit orthotists onto the distance learning courses offered by the National Centre.

Regional orthotic interest groups, such as the London group coordinated by Paul Charlton, have been successful in bring multidisciplinary audiences together. These early evening events typically involve an invited speaker on a topical issue followed by a facilitated discussion. Other regional groups are also running in various formats which allow orthotists to reflect upon clinical issues in a structured way.

BAPO has an education committee and seeks to 'approve' courses after reviewing their curricula; the committee is also involved in developing courses in key skills which can then be rolled out around the country. There seem to be typical cognitive processes by which orthotists transition from graduates to become experienced clinicians; these processes should inform strategies for delivering CPD for orthotists. Therein lies the challenge.

Technician training

Technician training is broadly recognised to be inconsistent and previous initiatives such as the NVQ scheme had poor uptake. Technicians would like some form of nationally recognised and transferable qualification and there continues to be a need for technician

training outside of the organisation in which the person works. Collaboration between the BAPO Technicians Committee and Strathclyde University will hopefully lead to more opportunities becoming available. Some excellent ideas presented at the meeting included provided training for technicians related to specific products and training orthotists and technicians together, reflecting the way they work in practice.

Conclusions

It is yet to be seen if this meeting has any lasting impact; the trustees appreciated the efforts of all those who made presentations and participated in the discussion. The lack of any clearly defined recommendations from the meeting was acknowledged; however the trustees hope that by bringing together stakeholders in CPD for orthotists and technicians some myths about the OETT were dispelled and some advancement may occur.

Clearly some mismatch exists between the training needs of orthotists and technicians and the educational opportunities available to them; whenever possible the OETT would like to overcome any financial barriers. The OETT is unable to deliver courses itself; the trust is a charity that exists to fund the training and education of orthotists and orthotic technicians. The trustees welcome any applications that can meet the stated purposes of the trust, and encourage creative but clear thinking about how training for orthotists and orthotic technicians can be achieved. Applications may be made to reimburse personal CPD or for the establishment or maintenance of training opportunities.

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Chair of OETT