Q: Why is the College changing its policy?
A: Mainly for two reasons. The policy was due for renewal in 2006, but has been delayed due to the uncertainties of what shape revalidation would take. We now have firm guidance on how CPD will form part of revalidation, and so that the policy has the confidence of our members, the GMC, patients, carers, and others, we have made changes to make this more appropriate to present day practice.

Q: I found the ‘old’ Internal/External distinction quite confusing. Why is it still there?
A: Many members were unsure as to what constituted Internal or External. For example, is it External if the speaker is from outside the Trust, and what if the Trust is large in size and there is a combined seminar for all doctors at one site? Could that really be Internal? So we have been applying the rule flexibly in recent years provided the recommended 50 hours is achieved. We still maintain that it is important for psychiatrists to make their learning both Internal and External to their department but no limit has been set for these. Broadly speaking, any activity that widens the audience beyond your local department would be considered to be External CPD.

Q: I am still confused! You have practically abolished Internal/External CPD but you have introduced three new domains.
A: Correct! CPD needs to be a little bit more sophisticated so just achieving 50 hours without differentiating what type of CPD, for example clinical or research, you need to perform will give no direction to the educational activities that psychiatrists undertake. Some Medical Royal Colleges already have this differentiation. We expect clinicians to undertake a minimum of 30 CPD hours in the Clinical Domain, but there will be flexibility around this rule depending on peer group support, and adjudication by the CPD Executive Committee if necessary.

Q: I tend to do much of my research and course work on-line. Does this count towards my credits?
A: You will need to produce evidence that any online activity has an educational value, and that one credit is equivalent to an hour’s study. You may count up to 10 credits annually in this way, in any of the three domains. This may also be achieved by accessing good training web-based College schemes such as Advances in Psychiatric Treatment and CPD Online.

Q: I am glad you have acknowledged peer group activity as counting towards my CPD. Does this include psychotherapy notes? If so, could I keep these notes in a confidential file for personal use only?
A: It seemed anomalous that having promoted peer groups, we did not acknowledge their CPD worth. This policy corrects that. You can now count up to 5 credits for 5 hours worth of peer discussions and this includes discussions around psychotherapy notes. Any notes you keep are subject to data protection and freedom of information and therefore can be expected to be made available if required.

Q: I am retired from clinical practice, but I undertake some Mental Health Tribunal and medico-legal work. Why do I need 50 CPD credits?
A: Simply because you will need to keep up-to-date with any clinical treatments to be able to give advice to the Tribunal or a court. Patients will not want anything less from you as you sit on the hearings or present your findings as an ‘expert’ in your field. You, like everyone else, will need appraisal and revalidation, and without CPD you are unlikely to get a licence to practise.

Q: I can’t find a peer group. What shall I do?
A: Have you looked hard enough? Are there a few psychiatrists around with similar work patterns? Revalidation does require some scrutiny of the quality of your CPD, and a peer group will ensure more support and advice than you might get from the CPD Executive Committee, who will be responsible for scrutinising your CPD portfolio.

Q: I can’t seem to get the time or the resources to attend courses these days. What shall I do?
A: In order that you keep up-to-date with your practice, whether clinical or not, it is imperative that you set out clearly your CPD priorities for the year. Planning prospectively makes your job easier. Once study leave is granted, resources will have to be committed by your employers.

Q: I am thinking of going to the APA, and I have sponsorship to attend the conference from a pharmaceutical company. Is it ethical to accept this?
A: The pharmaceutical companies are governed by strict sponsorship guidance by the ABPI so as long as the conference is approved by your peer group as being appropriate to your PDP and your employer grants you study leave, there should be no ethical dilemmas. You do though have the responsibility to ensure that any added hospitality is commensurate with attending the meeting.

Q: I do not want to join the College CPD scheme. What options do I have?
A: As long as you adhere to the guidance offered by the College, you may be able to present your CPD returns to your appraiser for final approval. If you are a member of another Medical College, than certification by them would be sufficient evidence for revalidation.

Q: I have heard that the College might develop a web-based e-portfolio.
A: This is still in the making. We will keep you posted on any developments.

Q: I am an ex-member of the College. Can I join the College CPD scheme?
A: Yes, but only if you re-join the College as a Member once more. It will not be possible for you to join as an affiliate or to register just for the CPD scheme.
Q: What quality assurance is there that the system of CPD is effective?
A: We randomly audit 5% of all returns annually. The audit establishes whether psychiatrists do what they say on the CPD portfolio, that there is evidence of learning objectives, peer groups, number of CPD credits, evidence of Internal and External CPD, etc. We therefore recommend that all psychiatrists keep their documentation of attendance at a CPD event for the audit and until they are revalidated.

Q: I am considering working abroad for a short period of two to three years. How can I remain in good standing with the College?
A: There are two ways: if you are still registered with the GMC, you should continue to submit your returns to the College giving evidence that you are achieving 50 CPD credits in the three domains. The other option is that you stay CPD compliant with the new body you are registered with, and check that there are reciprocal arrangements of approval.

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