

EDITORIAL

eCPD

Cornelius Katona

At the end of last year, the Royal College of Psychiatrists decided to develop a programme of eCPD. In January I was appointed editor of this project. An advisory board has now been appointed, as has a full-time administrator.

The College is deservedly well known for its careful financial husbandry and has a very successful paper-based range of supports for its Fellows' and Members' CPD. What possessed it to embark on something new, expensive and potentially competitive with existing products, most notably of course with *APT*?

In part, the answer is Wildean: the only thing worse than launching an eCPD service is *not* to offer such a service. If we do not, the vacuum will be filled by eCPD products sponsored by and reflecting the interests of pharmaceutical companies and commercial publishers. Can we really hope that they will offer a range of CPD support that is flexible and comprehensive enough to meet the rapidly changing needs of today's and tomorrow's psychiatrists?

Added value?

The question remains of what extra value or function an e-based aid to CPD, however trendy, will have. It should be able to provide 'packages' that allow participants to study at their own pace, choose content relevant to their job needs and agreed CPD plans, assess their progress against well-defined learning outcomes and, with only minimal extra effort, document their achievements in their CPD, appraisal and revalidation records. Such eCPD material is already widely available both in psychiatry (mainly in the form of pharma-sponsored material, much of it American) and in other specialties. The *BMJ*'s eCPD for general practitioners (<http://www.bmjlearning.com>) is a particularly good-quality example in terms of its wide and relevant range of topics, its tight but highly interactive structure and its straightforward approach

to documentation and linkage to appraisal and revalidation.

New links

What relationship will there be between eCPD and the College's existing and primarily paper-based publications? Part of the answer of course is that all of the College's publications are developing an increasing electronic dimension. This year, there have been over 20 000 'hits' per month on the *British Journal of Psychiatry*'s website. The submission and peer review process for all College journals is shortly to become electronic, with considerable saving in trees as well as a much more transparent tracking process. This means that it will become increasingly easy to make links between eCPD material and reference material in other College publications. It will also be possible to develop eCPD content that uses existing *APT* articles as a starting point or, more creatively, to co-commission articles and eCPD material on the same topics. The relationships with other College publications, and most specifically with *APT*, will thus be complementary rather than competitive.

Success is in your hands

The success of our eCPD depends on several things. These include developing a workable template that is attractive both to authors and users, and the growth of constructive relationships with *APT*, with other College publications and with the CPD committee. Cross-representation on editorial boards should help achieve this. More important still will be the enthusiasm of Members and Fellows (individually and through their CPD peer groups) to suggest topics, to write appropriate material, to use what we develop and to criticise it constructively. Over to you.

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