

Identification of Learning Needs



Some physiotherapists may be aware of educational needs and others may not be as clear. Needs are different from wants. You may *want* to learn more about the technique of acupuncture but you may need to learn about the informed consent process to ensure that patients are clear about your activities. How do you identify a need? Here is one exercise to assist you in identifying needs that arise directly out of your practice. This exercise consists of recording any questions that may come up for a defined period of time and examining those questions to determine any trends. Those trends then become learning needs.

The majority of our learning results from events that occur at work requiring us to think about the experience and consider possible actions. We can learn from both positive and negative experiences.

It has been noted that the use of a diary to record learning needs is associated with a significantly higher level of specificity in the learning needs identified, (adapted from Perol, Boissel et al. 2002). The more specifically the training need is identified, the more likely it is that you will be able to achieve the learning goal. The following exercise is designed to assist you in exploring your own practice, to help you identify any trends in questions that arise during the day, to summarize your questions and to identify any recurring issues. These issues are then turned into learning goals for action.

The exercise is designed to assist in identifying learning opportunities. It consists of two parts. First, there is a section to write down your known learning needs. Then, during or at the end of each day, record questions that came up during the day. Continue this process each day you work for a period of two weeks. At the end of the two week period, review the questions you had recorded and summarize your observations. Use the summary to develop your learning goals.

To identify these questions reflect on those incidents that were significant to you. Perhaps they

- made you stop and think
- caused you to feel anxious or uncertain about your knowledge, skill or ability
- made you feel inadequate in some way
- made you feel angry or disappointed
- caused you to question the status quo
- came as a pleasant surprise
- were exciting or inspiring

Some examples could be:

- a patient asking a question about their pathology to which you did not have an answer
- a patient being referred with a diagnosis you had no familiarity with
- being promoted into a leadership role for which you had no previous experience
- being asked to take on a particular project which was out of your usual practice area

Step One

First, name four topics or procedures for which you have previously identified immediate education needs. Topics might include understanding medications used with a specific condition, understanding the pathophysiology of a condition, reviewing the anatomy of a joint or learning leadership skills. Procedures might include mobilizations for the knee, use of biofeedback equipment or facilitation skills for neurological conditions.

Step Two

Next, for a period of two weeks record on a daily basis the challenging situation(s) or other specific education needs you have identified.

Step Three

At the end of the two-week observation period read over your notes and summarize your comments. Consider what has been a recurrent theme. Select four of the topics or procedures for which you have identified education needs.

Step Four

You now have eight learning needs, four you identified in advance and four you identified in reviewing your questions from the two weeks. Prioritize these learning needs and select a couple for immediate action. Develop SMART learning goals, record those and develop action plans for achieving these goals.

Step One

Identification of Learning Needs	
Previously identified learning needs	
1)	
2)	
3)	
4)	
5)	

Step Two

Daily Situations		
Day	Week One	Week Two
Monday		
Tuesday		
Wednesday		
Thursday		
Friday		

Step Three

Summary of topics from previous two weeks

1)

2)

3)

Step Four

Priority goals for immediate action

1)

2)

3)