



The Ugly Duckling of CCP *Self-Assessment* and how to get to the Swan

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As regulated health professionals, we are required to complete continuing professional development (CPD) as a means to maintain and/or increase our clinical competence. This is true of most regulated professions and of utmost importance in healthcare.

The goal is to improve the quality of care our patients experience while increasing the knowledge base and skillset of our members. Ultimately, effective CPD results in increased job satisfaction through an engaged, educated and current workforce, as well as having a direct improvement to the healthcare system with ensured competence of its practitioners.

However, as I completed my Masters degree in Health Science Education, I became aware of a significant trend in the practice of CPD which ultimately threatens its effectiveness. So, in this article, I'd like to bring your attention to the *Self-Assessment* component of CPD.

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As members of self-regulated professions within the ACMDTT, one of the mandates is that you participate in the required Continuing Competence Program (CCP). As you know, each year you are required to complete a *Self-Assessment of Practice* in order to reflect upon your skillsets, and plan your CCP.

This then includes a *Personal Learning Plan* that speaks to the areas in your practice that you feel need work. ACMDTT has excellent resources available to help guide the process and document its completion, and you have the luxury of choosing which activities to do, with the caveat that some of these activities must be related to the learning objectives you set for yourself during the (dreaded) *Self-Assessment* (SA). As you can see, I've hinted at my own feelings towards SA *cringe* and apparently, research shows that I'm not alone in my dislike of SA. But fear not! I've learned a few tricks which will help turn that ugly duckling into a beautiful swan in no time!

***"Self-diagnosed
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Based on my research, it looks like ACMDTT has done an excellent job setting up a solid CPD program.

But let's talk about the elephant in the room. The point of the program is to select CPD activities that will help you address an identified gap in skill or knowledge of your practice that you identified in your SA. In fact, the entire cyclical process hinges on the SA piece and it is a critical first step! But what if this 'dreaded' step is skipped, not done well, or falsified?

The criticality of completing an accurate SA lies in a couple of key areas. The first is that this step is **motivating** and empowering. When one seeks to enhance their knowledge and skills and is responsible for implementing changes to improve their practice, it makes them feel good about doing so. In fact, research suggests that self-diagnosed areas for improvement are more motivating than those chosen for them or at random. It simply gives 'personal meaning' to the mandated practice of CPD.

The second is that the SA creates a focused **direction** for the professional development (PD). Quite simply, you don't need to learn what you already know. Selecting CPD activities based on areas requiring improvement helps the professional target those weak areas in an efficient manner, and leads to more obvious and meaningful improvement in practice.

"You don't need to learn what you already know"

This leads directly to the third benefit of an accurate SA; the simple **efficiency** that it provides. How wonderful is it to do a self-assessment, decide what it is that you need to work on, and focus right on that? If I'm honest – that is the most important thing for me. I have little interest in completing PD that isn't going to help me improve my practice. The clearer and more critical I can be with my SA only makes my plan for PD more relevant. As a busy professional, adding efficiencies in my life is very important! Sure, I learn things for fun everyday – but I don't claim them in my CPD portfolio, as they don't always have a tangible relation to my practice as a health professional.

So why does the Self-Assessment have a *homely* little reputation?

For many years it has been known that we (as a general rule) are naturally not very good at self-assessments. A brief review of the literature will solidify this point and highlights this as an area for



improvement within models that follow self-regulation and self-direction principles. The literature on SA points to a weakness in identifying gaps in one's knowledge – some suggesting that this practice is indeed quite poor!

The process of SA may not come naturally, but it can be learned and is easily improved with a little training, guidance and practice! What that means is that there is hope. Over time, and with practice, we can mold

the practice of SA from something mundane and dreaded into the metaphorical swan – the key piece of CPD that it is meant to be!

As you know, the ACMDTT provides tools and a SA template, but there are many others out there if you decide something different works for you. In the attempt to understand the SA a little better, I wanted to draw your attention to the crucial elements involved in SA for professional development:

First, you need something to compare yourself to. This would be a minimum set of standards or a 'bar' against which to assess yourself. Typically, this is established by the regulatory body to ensure patient safety is maintained. In your case, it is your Standards of Practice.

Next, you need to reflect. Urgh. This is the part we tend to struggle with and is a challenge for most people! Let's try to make it easy.

Take some time and reflect upon a typical workday (or maybe a more complex procedure if you are an experienced practitioner). Read through the Standards of Practice and ask yourself: where do you measure against that 'bar'? Where can you improve? Did you hesitate today? Did you question yourself? Did a colleague do something more efficiently than you did? What do you do well? What could you do better?

Keep in mind that this is a PERSONAL assessment. No one else needs to see this evaluation of your performance. Be honest. It is meant to be a safe and productive exercise to guide your professional development. It is not a punitive exercise!

When studies show that the practice of SA is flawed, it is typically because the study participants are not completing the reflection piece effectively. If you find that you struggle with this, try asking a colleague for feedback. Think of your last employee evaluation – were there any surprises? Making an honest effort here will be much more valuable to you and your practice.

Third, let's set some goals. You have your self-assessment laid out in front of you. Select at least two goals to work on this year. These goals should be linked directly to the identified gaps (weaknesses) in your self-assessment so they will be highly relevant.

But also consider their attainability – they should also be realistically achievable as well. It's great to have goals, but let's not start out setting ourselves up for failure either. The ACMDDT has a templated Personal Learning Plan that works well for this and helps you link the relevancy of your planned learning back to your identified gaps.

"Goals should be attainable, not setting ourselves up for failure."

Fourth, find learning activities to participate in that will target your goals and meet your needs. Sometimes this is a challenge. Access to learning opportunities may be difficult depending on your location and/or your workplace, but there are plenty of options out there. Look into: Online learning, webinars, journals, lunch-n-learn sessions, workshops, courses ... the list goes on! Other things to consider include: cost, time off work, level of difficulty, pre-requisites, required travel, etc.

Finally, we need to cycle back and re-evaluate. This is a phase that is often missed or skipped but is very important. Did you meet your goal? Did you learn anything new? Did you implement any changes or improve your performance or knowledge? Maybe you didn't – and that's okay too! You can't climb Mount Everest in a day! You can carry any remaining gaps forward to the next cycle. This step can be really helpful to ensure that you have a complete and robust learning plan.

Planning for appropriate and effective CPD means creating a CPD portfolio that is meaningful to your practice. There are many resources in place to help support you in doing so, but it is essential that you understand the importance of the SA component.

Often unpopular and overlooked, this crucial piece is the key to building a professional development plan that is efficient and motivating to the member. Without this 'duckling', ensuring that regulated health professions continue to provide high standards of care by highly competent professionals becomes more of a moving target and less of a purposeful and valued practice. [VP](#)

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