

# Maintaining professional competence

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## **Why it is so important for allied health practitioners to keep up to date?**

Continuing education and professional development is the way allied health practitioners continue to learn and develop throughout their careers following their initial entry into the profession, so they keep their skills and knowledge up to date. Maintaining professional competence demonstrates to patients and their families, employers, colleagues and the public that they have a continuing commitment to updating and extending their professional practice abilities. Continuing professional development enables allied health practitioners to gather new knowledge, evaluate its appropriateness to their clinical problems, and implement new learning into their practices (Rappolt and Tassone, 2002). Ultimately, successful continuing professional education improves patient care. However, the small, dispersed and diverse nature of the allied health field can limit access and uptake by creating economic, administrative, and interprofessional barriers to accessing and translating new evidence and skills into clinical practice. Thus, despite a move towards mandatory continuing education for many allied health professions, not all practitioners are keeping up to date and this has legal as well as ethical and professional implications.

Some researchers have shown that allied health practitioners demonstrate various motivational orientations toward continuing education and professional development, such as an individual desire to learn, professional advancement, responses to external pressures, the fostering of community, social interactions, and relief from routine or boredom (Tassone and Heck, 1997). However, for continuing education and professional development to be successful, there needs to be an internal motivation and drive to maintain and improve professional

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