



VCNZ Update

VETERINARY COUNCIL
OF NEW ZEALAND
Te Kaunihera Rata Kararehe o Aotearoa

Writing effective CPD reflective notes

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An important component of continuing professional development (CPD) is maintaining a learning record that ideally includes “reflective notes”. New graduates are familiar with reflective writing, but it can be somewhat perplexing for veterinarians who are not trained in this method.

Why reflective writing?

Reflective writing encourages learning. Writing something down about a CPD event forces you to think clearly about its value. Using a systematic approach such as a CPD reflective note template or a consistent structure encourages ongoing analysis of the value of the CPD events.

The use of reflective notes is recognised as an important component of verification of CPD for human health professionals: “The use of reflective notes written by the public health professional about their learning is the most discriminating form of evidence of effective CPD”¹

Reflective writing helps to embed the learning into your future practice repertoire. Reflective writing is the process of documenting what you have learnt through the process of reflective thinking.

What is reflective thinking?

Reflection involves running the new information through the filter of your past experiences, your values, beliefs and assumptions. It helps you interpret the new information, “sense-check” it, think about the meaning in your context and plan how this can be used to add value to your practice.

Reflective thinking is personal and unique for each individual. There is no right or wrong way of reflective thinking

about a CPD event. Much depends on what you already know and how you place this in the context of new learning.

Reflecting on real work problems can help to identify the best ways to apply what we know in practice and lead to better outcomes.

Reflection will help you identify your own learning needs.

Reflection is central to becoming an effective, critical professional who is prepared to challenge the way things are done.

What is reflective writing?

Reflective writing provides evidence of reflective thinking. It is not merely a description of a CPD event.

Reflective writing involves:

- looking back (reflecting backward) at an event (for example, something that happened – a seminar or even an idea)
- documenting your thoughts about the event or idea
- writing carefully about what the event or idea means for you and your ongoing progress as a practising professional (reflecting forward).

Writing reflective notes

A reflective note for each CPD activity should contain the following three elements (Table 1):

1. the **title** of the CPD activity or objective
2. the **outcome** of the activity (what you learnt)
3. the **impact** on your work and further learning needs.

A system for recording reflective notes is also part of the online NZVA MyCPD recording system.

Reflective writing involves descriptive (what, when, who), explanatory (how, why, what if) and expressive (I think, I feel, I believe) language. There should be evidence of critical thinking and honest self assessment. The appropriateness of the CPD event to your practice should be clear and ideally should link to your personal CPD plan (a CPD plan is not currently compulsory). Awareness of future CPD needs that become obvious through the reflective process should be documented.

i A template for writing reflective notes is available on the VCNZ website: www.vetcouncil.org.nz/pubs.php#CPDrecord

Reference

1. Syed N, A Scouler and L Reaney (2012) *Faculty of Public Health Tips on Writing Effective Reflective Notes*. London: Faculty of Public Health of the Royal Colleges of Physicians of the United Kingdom.

Table 1: Examples of reflective notes that can be used to verify CPD activities

Activity No. (from Activity Summary)	Topic or publication details and/or CPD objectives	Learning outcomes (what I learnt or delivered)	Impact (how this has or may benefit my work)
1	WSAVA 2013. Antibiotic use in small animal dermatology – what should we be using? Paul B Bloom	This presentation discussed treatment decisions for superficial bacterial folliculitis in the dog and addressed concerns around antibiotic resistance.	This presentation was valuable for me in that it reinforced the importance of judicious clinical decisions around antibiotic use. This is an every-day issue for me, and one strategy I took away from the presentation was the option to reduce the reliance on antibiotic use by incorporating antiseptic/chemical adjunctive treatments in managing these skin problems. This presentation underlined the need for me to identify further CPD on this topic.
2	WSAVA 2013. Rational use of pre-surgical antibiotics. Lauren A Trepanier	This presentation reviewed the criteria for deciding to use antibiotics associated with surgery, how to use them correctly and which types of antibiotics for which operations.	This was a useful review for me and helped me to establish solid criteria to inform my treatment decisions. As well, the discussion looked at relevant and practical environmental factors in the clinic that could be negated to reduce the risks of peri-operative infection rates.