

Eye on The Future

Part 2 - CET and the public

As the end of the CET cycle approaches, **Alison Ewbank** looks at attitudes to continuing education and unmet needs with current provision

Most practitioners would accept that continuing education and training is good for the profession and for patients. But what precisely are the benefits? How does the public perceive the CET requirements placed on optometrists and dispensing opticians? And are practitioners satisfied with current training provision?

The Eye on the Future Study, commissioned by The Vision Care Institute of Johnson & Johnson Medical, provides some useful insight into attitudes to CET as the second three-year cycle under the compulsory scheme comes to an end. The study involved telephone interviews with a total of 500 optometrists and dispensing opticians, and with 1,000 consumers aged 18 or over.

The results show that practitioners recognise the importance of continuing education. Most agree that CET allows more advances in vision care (84 per cent), is essential for their professional growth (88 per cent) and allows them to feel more confident as eye care professionals (ECPs) (91 per cent).

Above all, practitioners believe participation in CET allows them to serve their patients to the best of their ability (94 per cent).

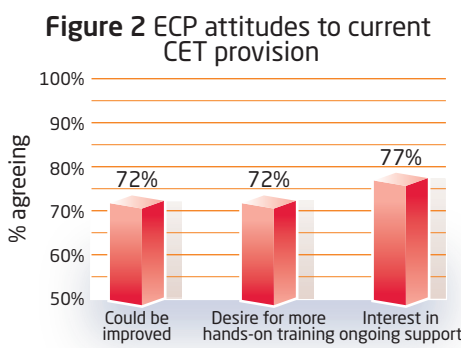
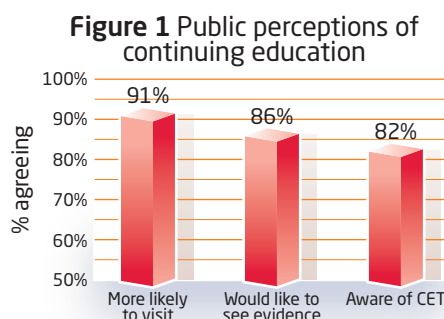
'It's compulsory but, personally, I would feel like I'm letting myself down if I didn't do it. I wouldn't be doing my job properly. I do it out of interest for my work.'

Optometrist, West Sussex

Consumer awareness

More surprising is the fact that consumers also seem to have a good understanding of CET. Most are aware that optometrists and dispensing opticians have mandatory training requirements to keep professional skills and knowledge up to date (Figure 1).

Crucially, more than nine out of



10 say they would be more likely to visit a practitioner who participates in CET than one who does not. And a similar proportion would like ECPs to provide evidence of participation through information displayed in their practices.

Practitioners also recognise that consumers place a high value on education and training. Nearly seven out of 10 (68 per cent) say that undertaking CET will allow them to attract and retain more patients.

ECPs undergo CET on a regular basis. A majority (61 per cent) participate in CET activities at least once a month and nearly nine in 10 (89 per cent) take part four times a year or more. Heading the list of preferred topics is advances in ocular health and contact lenses but patient communication and business issues are also popular.

As found in other studies, journal-based CET and educational events

are the preferred formats followed by online and CD-based learning. Peer-reviewed journals are less popular, preferred by fewer than one in four practitioners (23 per cent).

'I like to refresh my memory about topics and eye problems I rarely see in my current position, and keep up-to-date on the latest innovations.'

Optometrist, London

Room for improvement

But the survey also suggests some room for improvement in currently available CET. More than seven out of 10 practitioners say that resources could be improved ('greatly' or 'somewhat'). They would like greater access to hands-on training and resources, and would be interested in ongoing support after attending a workshop (Figure 2).

Practitioners recognise that they would significantly benefit from training in a hands-on environment (87 per cent) and value the exchange of ideas and discussion at seminars and workshops (89 per cent). Interestingly, most also say they would gain from CET that is more 'cutting edge' (83 per cent).

Aside from format and content, other factors influence ECPs' decision to attend CET events. Location and time constraints are the most important factors identified; nearly two out of three (65 per cent) say it is often hard for them to find time for CET. Cost is also an issue for around four in 10 practitioners (41 per cent).

As a new CET cycle approaches, most practitioners recognise the value of regular training. A wider variety of learning formats is becoming available and this research suggests practitioners will welcome the opportunity to take part.

The Eye on the Future Study highlights another opportunity. Why not tell patients you are continuing your education and show evidence of your achievements? You may well be surprised by the response. ●