

# Learning to change

## Coming updates to the CFPC Mainpro® program

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Continuing education, or *continuing professional development* (CPD) as we currently refer to it, must evolve as the ways in which we practise and learn evolve. Lifelong learning has always been at the core of what College of Family Physicians of Canada (CFPC) members look for from their College. As far back as 1954, when the College was formed, considerable emphasis was placed on creating an organization with the capacity to engage members in addressing the changing knowledge and skills necessary to provide optimal care to their patients and their communities. Of equal importance was the creation of an organization whose standards for maintaining clinical proficiency were sufficiently rigorous to counter the perception of highly knowledgeable, skilled family physicians being classified as “just GPs.”

These days, continuous lifelong learning remains one of the absolute requirements for all 29 000 CFPC members, and this fundamental element persists for one very simple reason. As in 1954, it goes back to the implicit commitment we, as family physicians, have to our patients: we commit, as individual members, to maintaining competence through participation in CPD, and we commit as a College to ensuring that the systems we organize around members’ CPD are robust, relevant, and grounded in the best available evidence. This is one of the fundamental things that allows us to define, for our patients and for the Canadian public, the importance of membership in the CFPC.

Given this, it is our obligation as individual members and as a College collectively, to examine the degree to which the CPD system we have created—known as the Mainpro® (Maintenance of Proficiency) program—is able to equip CFPC members to meet the needs of their patients and communities. Further, we need to ensure that Mainpro reflects the variety of ways in which members practise and learn, and takes full advantage of the opportunities that technology continues to provide, in terms of both enhanced interaction among colleagues and improved patient outcomes.

The College’s National Committee on Continuing Professional Development (NCCPD) has the primary responsibility for developing and recommending changes to Mainpro. The NCCPD regularly evaluates how closely Mainpro fulfils what members and their patients require from a regulated, mandatory CPD system. As a committee, they have brought together a group of educational experts from inside and outside the College, referred to as the Mainpro Standards Working Group, to assist in

this process. For the past several years, these 2 groups of committed College members have been working collaboratively with family physicians across the country to establish a plan for enhancing the Mainpro program, basing proposed changes on the factors and approaches discussed within this commentary. This plan is now nearing finalization, and will soon be presented to the CFPC Board of Directors for consideration and approval.

### What is changing about how family physicians learn in practice?

Family medicine and the ways we practise our profession have changed markedly over the past several years. So, it makes sense that how we learn—both for and about practice—has changed as well. Although new technology has facilitated many such changes, some have come about simply because we think about and do things differently than we have in the past. The following are some examples of ways in which CPD has changed.

**Where learning happens.** We have gone from depending on events, such as conferences and workshops as preferred venues for learning, to looking for learning opportunities that arise from the things we do during a typical workday.

**Audience.** We now seek out learning opportunities that focus on the entire clinical team rather than physicians or physician groups in isolation.

**Topics.** What we teach and learn has expanded beyond prescribing and disease-based programs to encompass all competencies required to perform effectively and efficiently as a family physician. These include communication, collaboration, and management skills, among others.

**What we mean by practice.** So many of us are occupying roles beyond the clinical care setting that CPD now needs to encompass a variety of activities such as teaching, research, and administration.

**Outcomes.** Rather than simply assessing if a CPD activity was enjoyable for participants, we now subject it to

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a more advanced set of measurement parameters: Did participants' behaviour change, and did that change make things better for their patients, as a result of participating in the CPD activity?

So, how could or should Mainpro change in response to these system-level changes? What else have we heard from members about the current system that needs to be addressed?

### Some things should stay the same

As we consider making revisions to the existing Mainpro program, we must ensure that we retain the core of what we have always valued about it. We need to be sure, for example, that the CPD programs the CFPC reviews and accredits continue to be based on the best available scientific evidence, grounded in adult-learning principles, and presented in a balanced, unbiased manner.

As well, we must ensure that we strike a balance between setting rigorous standards for CPD that meet the needs of the rapidly changing face of family medicine and the realities of the work and personal demands our members encounter. For that reason, we propose to keep the basic parameters for Mainpro participation the same: a 5-year reporting cycle, a minimum of 250 credits per cycle, and a minimum of 25 credits earned and reported annually.

### Some things need to change

As the CFPC continues to improve and evolve the Mainpro program, we believe a defined set of values and principles will help to guide development and serve as measures of program success. They will ensure that the lifelong learning needs of individual members can be achieved within a framework that provides a balance of flexibility and academic rigour.

Such values and principles must represent the College's understanding of optimal knowledge support for practice, given the evolving roles of family physicians practising within an ever changing health care system. They must also reflect Canadian family physicians' interests and needs, and support improved care for the populations College members serve.

So, what might these values and principles look like? Here are a few ideas.

**Simplicity.** How we categorize educational activities needs to be straightforward, sensible, and intuitive. Have you ever asked, or been asked, what the Mainpro designations M1, M2, and C signify? If you cannot come up with an answer that makes sense, you are not alone.

**Comprehensiveness.** The activities we accredit should reinforce and support learning aimed at the range of

CanMEDS–Family Medicine competencies required for high-quality performance as a family physician.

**Availability.** Relevant CPD programming should be available to all members in formats that best support their individual needs and preferences.

**Reflection and application.** The effects of an educational activity on practice—not mere participation—should determine whether and how many credits are earned.

**Individualization.** The choice of educational activities should be driven by members' current practice profiles and activities, the questions that arise in meeting their patients' and communities' needs, and their aspirations and curiosity. Mainpro should provide sufficient flexibility for a wide spectrum of learning activities to be recognized for credit.

### What is next?

The plan prepared by the NCCPD and the Mainpro Standards Working Group will reflect current understandings of how, when, and where family physicians need and want to learn. It will also be based on values and principles, like those outlined above, that we as a College can agree upon. Because the NCCPD recognizes that changes to something as important as the CPD system in which we must all participate are important for all of us, they have committed to ensuring sufficient time between the approval of changes to the Mainpro program and their implementation. This, in turn, will provide members with the necessary opportunity to comprehend and prepare for the changes, and to have any questions about the revised Mainpro program addressed. To support these system-based changes to Mainpro, the College will also improve the online platform members use to report and track Mainpro credits. The intention behind making changes to the reporting and tracking platform, as for those to the Mainpro program as a whole, is to make it easy for members to do the "right thing"—for themselves, for their profession, and, most important, for the health of their patients. 🌱

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#### Competing interests

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