

peer learning groups for optometrists



CPD group learning made easy

PRODUCED FOR MEMBERS BY OPTOMETRISTS ASSOCIATION AUSTRALIA-VICTORIA

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Peer Learning Groups

Peer learning in small groups is a professional development option that may suit your professional and practical learning needs, and help you achieve your Continuing Professional Development (CPD) points. This form of learning is acceptable to the Optometry Board of Australia (OBA), provided your activities meet the CPD guidelines established by the OBA.

Peer Learning Groups consist of a small group of optometrists who meet to discuss, share and learn about topics of professional interest. It could be a one-off event or you might meet regularly throughout the year.

WHAT DO PEER LEARNING GROUPS OFFER?

Peer Learning Groups complement other face-to-face and self-directed methods of education and give optometrists in similar situations the opportunity to get together for professional development.

Optometrists who choose Peer Learning Groups as part of their CPD education can benefit from:

- learning from colleagues in a small-group setting
- an alternative to the more traditional methods of learning
- learning close to work or home
- suggesting topics of personal interest
- the convenience of flexible timing for meetings
- collegial connection and support
- accessible CPD.

As meeting times and locations are generally agreed upon by the members, a Peer Learning Group can be a practical option for optometrists:

- who find it difficult to attend scheduled CPD events such as conferences
- living in a regional or rural location
- to help you 'top up' your CPD points
- seeking education options during parental or other leave.

WHAT SORT OF ACTIVITIES WOULD WE DO?

Peer Learning Groups can choose methods for stimulating education. Groups may choose such activities as:

- presenting case-studies
- pre-reading and discussing relevant journal articles or other materials
- viewing footage of an expert presentation via DVD, webinar or online and then discussing
- raising a relevant topic for exploration and open discussion
- alternating presentations by individual members on different topics.

The group setting also lends itself to valuable discussion among members. This raises diverse perspectives and provides a breadth of opinion and ideas that can help your thinking and practice.

Peer group learning and CPD points allocation

The OBA requires all optometrists to earn at least 40 CPD points per year – with flexibility for this to be earned as 80 points over a two-year period.

Of the 40 points per year, 12 points need to be earned in face-to-face learning settings such as lectures, discussion groups or workshops. Peer Learning Groups are considered face-to-face learning.

DIFFERENT ACTIVITIES AND OPTIONS

Your Peer Learning Group might be able to earn CPD points in the following way:

1 Small group peer discussions, journal article reviews, or peer review of case studies

Your group could undertake a structured or unstructured discussion where you compare individual approaches to clinical optometry topics, discuss patient case studies or management examples, or work through journal articles together.

2 Lectures and invited speakers

Your group may decide to organise an expert or external guest speaker or lecturer on a particular topic. For example, you might organise a local ophthalmologist, GP, pharmacist or an optometrist with recognised expertise in a particular clinical area such as children's vision or sports vision, to come and present to your group. The activity should include at least 45 minutes of lecture/speaking time, plus an allowance of at least 15 minutes for questions and discussion.

Provided the topic meets the OBA guidelines for clinical learning, there is no limit placed on how many CPD points you can earn per year for this type of learning.

3 Workshops

Small group workshops involve a mix of practical learning activities and theory-based or didactic learning. For example, you may have someone come and demonstrate gonioscopy to your group, starting with a presentation and discussion, followed by

hands-on learning where participants are practising the technique with supervision.

You cannot have any more than 20 participants in a workshop to meet the OBA requirements but this is unlikely to be a problem for your Peer Learning Group.

IMPORTANT INFORMATION ABOUT ALLOCATING/CLAIMING YOUR POINTS

The OBA has specific guidelines to make sure that activities which optometrists claim as CPD meet high standards, and that you can justifiably claim that they meet the aims of professional development, and help you to continue to practice safely and with up-to-date knowledge.

Information about allocating points for your activities is available in Guidelines produced by the Optometry Board of Australia. These Guidelines are subject to routine review and are updated from time to time.

You can also contact Optometrists Association Australia (Victoria) to discuss your activities and understand how points are allocated.

As a small group, it will ultimately be up to you to understand the guidelines and requirements, and make sure that any activity you undertake which group members are going to claim towards CPD meets these requirements. The Guidelines are available on the website of the OBA (www.optometryboard.gov.au), and we recommend everyone in your group reads the guidelines so you understand how the points work. You might want to have a discussion of these guidelines for 5-10 minutes at your first meeting, and distribute a copy for peoples' records.

There are some key points the OBA makes about the quality and standard of education, and we've summarised these here to help you. Broadly:

- Your activity should reflect the current standard of practice, be evidence-based and be supported by peer reviewed literature. Activities

promoting theories or ideas not supported by evidence or within the profession generally aren't acceptable.

- Any materials you use or present should be as current and relevant as possible, and pitched to the sort of standard practising optometrists would understand and learn from.
- Where possible, try to use evidence and sources relevant to Australia (e.g., referring to medications available in Australia, or using Australian data or epidemiology).

Therapeutic points

For optometrists who are therapeutically endorsed, at least 20 points each year needs to be in areas relevant to this endorsement.

A CPD activity 'relevant to endorsement' is one where learning activities are addressed to one or more of the therapeutic competencies.

You might want to consider whether therapeutic topics are important for your groups' members.

Optometrists who are not therapeutically-endorsed can still earn points from therapeutics topics.

CONSIDER HAVING SOME EVENTS PRE-APPROVED FOR CPD POINTS

If you are thinking about a particular kind of presentation or workshop topic, but you're not really sure how it fits, or how many points it would earn, consider submitting the idea in advance for consideration and approval of points. This process is undertaken through Optometrists Association Australia, which has been specifically enabled by the Board to allocate points on application from CPD providers.

This is a good idea if:

- you are planning an event with a guest lecturer/speaker and want to advertise it with the number of available CPD points; or
- you are keen to have approval for the points for a specific reason (e.g., to advertise it as having therapeutics points).

You can get feedback as to how the points work in practice, and if points are pre-awarded, everyone knows where they stand.

You won't need to do this every meeting, e.g., for a small-group discussion about a journal article, but it is an option for lectures or workshops with external speakers.

Staff at the state and national OAA offices are happy to discuss your topics with you.

ETHICAL AND LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS

While Peer Learning Groups offer a less formal learning option than other CPD activities, it is important to remind group members about maintaining high ethical and legal standards.

- Take care when presenting information about patients, such as case-studies, to ensure identities are not disclosed. (If this is not possible, patient consent must be obtained prior to sharing information in the group).

- Maintain professional standards in discussion of patient issues.
- Ensure you gain permission before presenting any copyrighted information that is not already in the published domain.

GROUP LEADERSHIP

Most groups form through the initiative of one or two committed people. These group 'leaders' tend to take on the initial responsibility for the group's establishment.

While one person can quite readily establish a small Peer Learning Group, it may be a good idea to share the initial responsibility between two people. If you have ever been involved in a club, book group or committee, the principles of group leadership are quite similar. Usually, other members

When presenting information about patients, such as case-studies, make sure identities aren't disclosed.

Getting started

Forming a Peer Learning Group requires a degree of planning to ensure its success.

The following questions can help clarify the nature and purpose of your Peer Learning Group, to help set the direction:

- Who will facilitate, or lead the group?
- How will we recruit members?
- Where and when will we meet?
- What type of format will meetings take?
- What topics and activities could we include?
- Will membership be limited to the original group?
- How will we decide if future interested optometrists can join the group?
- Are there some general learning goals the group can agree on?

gradually take on some responsibility over time – although they might need encouragement.

Group leaders or facilitators are generally responsible for:

- acting as the main point of contact
- communicating with group members before the meetings
- organising meeting logistics in advance (e.g., venue, facilities, pre-reading, refreshments, note-taking etc.)
- ensuring members are able to engage and contribute equally during meetings
- ‘steering’ the group discussion to ensure it stays on track
- reminding the group of any ethical and legal considerations
- noticing and dealing with any difficult situations.

Generally, one person facilitates a meeting. See page 15 for more information on meeting facilitation skills.

GROUP MEMBERSHIP

The method used to recruit members for your Peer Learning Group will depend on whether the group will have a set membership, or will be open more broadly to interested members.

This model of professional development probably works best with a group of up to about eight people. Most groups would start with a core membership, which might change over time. It is important that you discuss how you will agree to new members joining the group. You might be happy for the group leader to decide this or you might decide that the existing group should agree to any new member joining the group.

Recruitment methods

You may be aware of a number of optometrists who have potentially similar learning needs, or who work in a similar geographic location or specialty area, who might be interested in participating in a Peer Learning Group. In this case, your recruitment method might be a direct email or phone call to individuals inviting them to a first meeting.

While it is probable that the group members will all be optometrists the group might choose to invite other health professionals such as general practitioners, ophthalmologists or pharmacists to be included in the group or invited to particular sessions.

Other methods for recruiting members could include:

- contact two or three interested colleagues and agree that each of you will invite another colleague, resulting in six to eight members.
- raise the opportunity through the Association e-bulletin or magazine. Just contact us at the OAA-Victoria office.

Regardless of your method of recruitment, it helps to prepare a few 'selling points' before contacting your colleagues, to inspire their interest. Points might include:

- benefits of a Peer Learning Group (i.e., informal learning, locality, topic-focussed, special interest, flexibility, etc.)
- some possible Peer Learning Group topics and activities

- how often you plan to meet
- “It’s a great opportunity to regularly catch up with colleagues over dinner or coffee”.

Members’ learning needs

Once you have determined the membership of the Peer Learning Group, it would help you to find out about their learning needs. Prior to the first meeting, you could ask individuals to identify:

- what topics they would like to learn about
- how many Peer Learning Group meetings they would prefer to attend during the year.

This information can be simply generated via email, and will help shape the first meeting, which is generally a planning opportunity. It will also help prepare the meeting facilitator to generate greater discussion about:

- members’ learning needs
- topics for the next meetings
- ideas for group learning activities or workshops
- how, where and when the meetings will occur
- the responsibilities of the facilitator role, with

agreement on who will assume that role over what period of time

- administrative responsibilities such as note taking, recording, etc.
- ‘ground rules’, such as respectful listening, involving all members, and maintaining confidentiality.

Meetings

Peer Learning Group meetings must last at least one hour to qualify for the minimum CPD point allocation for Peer Learning Group activity. Members might choose to meet for two hours to maximise their CPD points. Peer Learning Groups might meet regularly throughout the year, or they may only meet once.

MEETING LOCATION

The meeting space will depend on local availability, cost and accessibility. Possible venues include:

- practice rooms
- local community centres, halls, service club facilities

- a restaurant or café, with a private meeting area if patient information will be discussed or presented
- Optometrists Association Victoria meeting room in Carlton (available free of charge to members).

MEETING LOGISTICS

Making sure you pay attention to the practical details helps members fit this activity into their lives, and ensures things runs smoothly.

- Scheduling meeting dates in advance helps with planning busy professional and personal diaries. Be aware of other professional commitments or significant dates, such as SRC, when scheduling meetings through the year. Some members may prefer particular weekdays over others.
- Parents may need to organise extra childcare or may prefer to attend daytime meetings when children are at school. Consider meeting times and dates outside of school holiday periods if this is an issue for your group.

- Members will appreciate information about accessible parking or public transport options in advance.
- Make sure basic refreshments are available, such as tea, coffee, water and a light snack (perhaps one member is responsible each meeting for bringing refreshments). Or, your group might like to incorporate lunch or dinner with, before or after the meeting.
- Consider whether there is any equipment you will need at your meeting. For example some groups might want a laptop and data projector. Check with your group members to see if anyone has access to the equipment you need or choose a venue that can supply it. Equipment provided by venues generally comes with a charge.



CHOOSING A TOPIC

Keep the following tips in mind when choosing a topic.

- Try to be fairly specific. A topic that is too big or too general can be difficult to deal with.
- Keep an eye out for new developments in optometry publications.
- Try to choose a topic of interest to all group members.
- You might want to take turns in suggesting topics.
- Aim for variety in your topics, so you don't feel like the group is always discussing the same old things.
- Try to identify what is you want to learn about that topic.
- New ideas can come up while the group is deep in conversation about a particular issue. Consider keeping a calendar for potential future meeting topics.

Clinical and Experimental Optometry provides a wealth of articles, as do other local and international optometry journals. You might also consider medical, ophthalmology, public or rural health journals for a broad range of topics.

MEETING PREPARATION

- If there are papers to be reviewed prior to the meeting ensure that these are circulated with plenty of time for group members to read them before the meeting.
- It's a good idea to email all group members one week prior to the meeting to remind them of the meeting details.
- You might like to distribute an agenda with some or all of the following items: meeting date, venue, start and finish times, welcome to new members, follow up from the last meeting if relevant, structure for the discussion topic, discussion of future meeting topics and the date of the next meeting.

MEETING STRUCTURE

As the Peer Group Learning session is designed to help members meet their CPD requirements it is important there is a clear structure to the meeting and that members take their commitment seriously. In addition to meeting the quality component outlined earlier you might want to identify two or three clear learning objectives for each meeting.

It is reasonable to expect that all members will participate in the group. If any reading materials have been distributed prior to the meeting members should have read them prior to the meeting.

A structure or plan for the meeting is important to ensure that the intended elements and outcomes are covered, and that the peer learning session meets the group members' needs.

The meeting might include an introduction of the meeting activity by the facilitator or another group member. You might plan discussion of a journal or website article, discussion of one or more case studies, an invited speaker or other activities.

Costs

Consider whether there are costs involved in operating the group and how these are best covered. If there is a cost for the venue or for food/drink these should be discussed when setting up the group, so that they are shared equally. If you are just meeting in the back room at a local coffee shop it will probably be as simple as each person paying their own costs as they leave. Reasonable costs for education activities should be tax deductible so you might need some mechanism for shared receipts.

It's a good idea to email all group members one week prior to the meeting to remind them of the meeting details. You might like to distribute a meeting agenda as well.

Record keeping

For registration purposes, you need to keep a record of any non-accredited CPD activities you undertake – this includes your Peer Group Learning.

This isn't as arduous as it might sound. The simplest rule of thumb is to make sure everything you do is documented.

Members of the group should:

- Document the dates, times and venues of meetings attended
- Take and keep your own notes on the night, slip them into a 'CPD' folder
- Keep any materials distributed as part of the meeting, e.g., handouts or readings
- At the end of each meeting, make a note about the main things you think you have learned, and take-home points for your practice.

The Chair or organiser should also keep a record of who attended.

There are templates to help you with this record-keeping on the OBA website (www.optometryboard.gov.au) under Continuing Professional Development. Or you might choose to keep this as a 'reflective diary' where you include the session details along with notes about what you have learned and how this might translate into practice.

While you do not have to submit your records for non-accredited CPD activities the OBA ensures CPD standards by undertaking random audits. This means that at any time, individuals might be asked to submit evidence of their CPD activities to support the declaration that they have completed the requirement.

If this happens, you need to be able to justify all the activities you have undertaken, including any self-directed learning, and should be able to clearly show how it meets the CPD guidelines.

Annual review meeting

You might like to incorporate an annual review meeting. This gives members the opportunity to discuss and note:

- the benefits of the Peer Learning Group to individual members
- how they have utilised information in patient care
- any unexpected insights or outcomes
- interest in future participation.

You might also review how the group has worked at a practical level – how has the facilitation and organisation of activities worked? Can the work load be better shared?

You might time your annual review meeting to coincide with the anniversary of your first meeting or perhaps at the end of November to coincide with the end of the OBA CPD year.

Facilitation skills

Facilitating group meetings involves a degree of thought, skills in listening and ‘directing traffic’. It is important that group leaders involve and engage members rather than ‘control’ the meeting’s proceedings.

Effective communication and observation are important to meeting facilitation. Effective facilitators:

- are well-prepared for meetings, ensuring pre-reading, agendas and other materials are circulated well in advance
- follow the meeting agenda or program and bring the group back to the topic if the discussion gets ‘off track’
- observe the participation of group members, and notice individuals who dominate discussions or those who don’t tend to contribute
- refer to agreed ground rules to diplomatically steer away from dominant contributors and encourage less vocal members to participate

- address difficult situations, should they arise, in a non-confrontational manner. This might need to be done outside of a meeting.

While it makes sense to have a consistent person as group facilitator, at least for the first few meetings, it may be appropriate to share the group facilitation responsibility over time.

Remember that group facilitation is a skill and may not be for everyone. More tips for facilitating a group are at the end of this booklet.

Troubleshooting tips

While Peer Learning Groups generally operate very successfully, challenging situations may arise. The situations below can relate to any group setting, so it is useful to anticipate them before they happen.

Individuals dominate discussion

- Thank the person for their contribution
- Refer to group's 'ground rules' and stress that all

members of the group need opportunities to participate

- Invite/encourage other members to contribute to discussion

Group discussion gets off track

- Remind the group of the meeting's topic and steer the discussion back.
- 'Park' the issue/s being discussed, to revisit at another time.
- An issue which generates a lot of discussion could be a future meeting topic.

Member attendance

- Send an email or SMS reminder 2-3 days before the meeting.
- Decide on a minimum group number for the Peer Learning Group meetings.
- If numbers diminish, review the group membership and think about how to recruit more members and how many members you need to make the group viable.

Equal participation and contribution

- There might be good reasons why someone isn't participating, but lack of participation can cause problems for the group.
- This is probably best addressed by an honest conversation with the whole group if there are multiple members not participating, or individually if your concerns are with one particular member of the group.
- If the problem is with the whole group and the required educational results are not being met you might need to discuss the current structure and whether there are changes you can make to ensure the group is achieving its goals.

Facilitator role

- Consider building others' capacity to assume the facilitator role, or aspects of the role, over time.
- Gradually introduce individuals to share various aspects of the role, e.g., to coordinate the communication to members, set the draft agenda, etc.

Conflict arising among members

- De-fuse the immediate situation – don't allow it to progress during the meeting.
- Re-focus on the meeting's purpose and agenda.
- Speak to individual(s) outside of the meeting about the concern.
- Don't buy into emotive issues, and avoid taking sides.
- In the case of an individual or individuals being unable to work productively with the group, it may be they are not suited to the group or to this form of learning.



Facilitation tips

Most groups don't just 'work' – they need some direction. Whether you are the regular group facilitator or alternating the role between members here are some tips for facilitating the group.

1 Be prepared for the meeting. Know what the group is going to talk about. Have some questions up your sleeve to get the discussion going.

2 Make it clear when the group is actually starting. As people arrive you can chat about a range of things but as this is a learning group it is important to know when the business is actually starting. (“Ok, let's get started now!”)

3 Welcome any new member to the group

4 Set the parameters for the group each time (“Tonight we are going to discuss the article about . . . that has been distributed prior to the meeting. Let's aim to take equal time on each of the three sections of the article. We aim to finish our discussion at 8pm.”)

5 If you are asking questions of the group make sure you let others answer first – and allow some time because some people need a bit of time to think.

6 While you don't want to put people on the spot it can be useful to occasionally ask quiet group members a specific question particularly if you have talkative people who regularly come in quickly to the discussion. (“Mickey, do you have any comments you want to add?”)

7 Value all comments made in the group – you don't have to agree with everything that is said but it is important that group members feel their comments are valuable.

8 See if you can highlight similarities between comments. Linking what one member says now with something someone else said earlier can help build a conversation.

9 Make sure the other group members know you want them to help with how the group works. (“We are a bit stuck with this conversation. Has anyone got a suggestion for what we should discuss next?”)

10 Allow some flexibility but make sure the group doesn't go right off track. This can easily happen when someone has a particular interest in a side topic. (“This is an interesting conversation but I think we have wandered off tonight's topic. If the group is interested, we could schedule this discussion for another night.”)

11 Make it clear when the session is finished. Highlight any housekeeping points (“That brings the session to a close. Make sure you add the session to your CPD record. You will receive the next reading article one week before the meeting and everyone has agreed to bring one interesting case study along to the session for discussion.”)

Support from OAA-Victoria

OAA-Victoria can support your Peer Learning Group in a range of ways:

- Advice from Policy Manager about topics, managing groups, dealing with difficult situations, etc.
- Promoting your Peer Learning Group by email to members in your area
- Links to other Peer Learning Groups
- Access to meeting room

You can contact the office to talk about your Peer Learning Group. We'd love to hear about how your group is going.



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