

Review Article

## Adult Continuing Education in Health

**Fani Pegiou, RN, PhD ( c )**

Department of Nursing, International Hellenic University Thessaloniki, Greece

**Lambrini Kourkouta, PhD**

Professor, Department of Nursing, International Hellenic University Thessaloniki, Greece

**Konstantinos Koukourikos, RN, MSc**

Lecturer, Nursing Department, International Hellenic University Thessaloniki, Greece

**Christos Iliadis, RN, MSc**

Private Diagnostic Health Center Thessaloniki, Greece

**Theodora Thomopoulou, BSc, MSc Special Education, MSc Arts in Education**

Substituting Teacher of Special Education at the 1<sup>o</sup> ELEPAP Special Education Primary School, Athens, Greece

**Areti Tsaloglidou, BSc, MSc, PhD**

Associate Professor, Department of Nursing, International Hellenic University Thessaloniki, Greece

**Correspondence:** Kourkouta Lambrini, Professor, Nursing Department, International Hellenic University, Thessaloniki, Greece Email: laku1964@yahoo.gr

### Abstract

**Introduction:** Adult education is a distinct aspect of learning. For adult learners in health care, the role of continuing professional education in their personal, professional, and interprofessional development and on their health - related behaviors is crucial.

**Purpose:** This review explores the role of continuing professional education for adult learners in health care.

**Methods:** A literature review was conducted using the international databases Medline, PubMed, Cinahl, and the Greek database Iatrotek.

**Results:** In an ever-changing society, updating the knowledge of health professionals is a powerful tool for both individuals and socioeconomic development. The need of adults for continuous personal development and professional advancement, as well as the need of organizations for new strategies for development, modernization, and promotion of their human resources, have directed scientists to search for appropriate learning methods for this particular group.

**Conclusions:** Knowledge and proper implementation of evidence-based practices by health professionals is not only imperative but also essential. Adult health professionals facing the challenges of modern times are required to maintain and redefine knowledge and skills through continuing professional education.

**Keywords:** adults, continuing education, lifelong learning, health

### Introduction

Our society is constantly undergoing socioeconomic changes and challenges. The demands of technology, advances in medical science, globalization, demographic developments, and sudden health crises, such as the current COVID-19 pandemic and

environmental changes, etc., require employees to acquire specific skills and specialized knowledge within a vigorous work environment or to manage crises (Ioannidou, 2014).

Education and human capital are key components of economic growth, social cohesion, well-being, and employment. This

trend became particularly evident with the explosion of the industrial revolution in the early 19th-century (OECD, 2021a; Stauvermann & Kumar, 2018).

Both continuing vocational education and training (CVET), which undoubtedly guides to Continuing Professional Development (CPD), and Lifelong Learning are of major importance for the adoption of new knowledge and skills (Dymock & Tyler, 2018). It should be adapted to the respective working conditions and personal learning needs of health professionals, promoted within the organizational context of the organization, and activated through motivation (van der Burgt et al., 2018).

Adult learning is a particular part of the learning process, according to which modern learning approaches have been studied and developed (OECD, 2012).

In Greece, Law 3879/2010 fully recognizes the right to adult education and lifelong learning and underlines its crucial role in the personal and professional development of individuals, the economy, and the minimization of social and educational inequalities (Ministry of National Education and Religious Affairs, 2006).

Adult learners have multiple, complex experiences and are fully aware of the consequences of their choices, all of which interact with each other and affect their ways of learning (Chuang, 2021). In recent decades, the field of adult education has occupied an important place in research despite the global socioeconomic developments and development challenges mentioned above (Krespani et al., 2021).

This review examines adult continuing education in general and health education in particular.

The methodology used was based on a literature reviews and studies retrieved from the international databases Medline, PubMed, Cinahl, and the Greek database Iatrotek using keywords such as adults, continuing education, lifelong learning, and health.

## Continuing education

There is confusion in the literature regarding the term Continuing Professional Development (CPD), as it is often confused with the concepts of Continuing Professional Education (CPE), Lifelong Learning and the development of employees' professional skills. However, CPD is a broader concept than CPE, as although it is an integral part of Lifelong Learning, its purpose is to meet the individual goals of health professionals within their work context (Beaumont & Stainton, 2016). Therefore, to achieve this goal, the interaction between the individual expectations of employees and the contribution of the organization should coexist (Manley et al, 2018; Kourkouta et al., 2021).

According to the Farlex dictionary (2012), Continuing Professional Education (CPE) is defined as "Systematic professional learning experiences designed to enhance the knowledge and skills of health care professionals; education completed after the initial training program; required for renewal of licensure in certain fields" (continuing education, n. d.) (Farlex, 2012)

Therefore, CPE is a more structured educational activity for health professionals, which aims through 'updating' knowledge and skills to guide to professional development and growth, as well as undeniable positive outcomes for health users, organizations, and the economy (Beaumont & Stainton, 2016; Fukada, 2018).

Hence, it can be easily realized that the CPE of health professionals involves a lifelong acquisition of knowledge and skills that does not stop with the acquisition of basic credentials, some individual training, or academic attainment, but continues throughout and until the end of the career (Fukada, 2018; Koukourikos et al., 2021).

Furthermore, in the workplace, the promotion of CPE is an obligation of the service concerned, defined as in-service training, and has been one of the major issues on the agenda of global consultations on quality assurance in Health Support Services (HSS) in recent decades.

In an ever-changing society, where technological, health, and information advances are on the rise, updating the knowledge of health professionals is a powerful weapon in both individual and socioeconomic development (Tachtsoglou et al., 2021).

### **Adult Continuing Education**

By adult learner or adult student, we mean any adult over the age of 24 who, through their various roles and experiences, e.g., as an employee, head of household, parent, chooses to enrich their knowledge with some form of education or training (Khiat, 2015).

The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the European Commission, the World Bank, and the governments of developed and developing countries in the requirements of the sustainable development agenda converge on promoting and strengthening adult education as the driving force for increasing both productivity and the growth rate of the economy as a whole. Similarly, in 2015, the United Nations adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which was unanimously endorsed by world leaders.

"Transforming Our world: the 2030 agenda for sustainable development", which, among other things, highlights the goal of promoting Lifelong Learning at a global level.

Adults have a particular advantage over younger adults and learn more effectively because they act more consciously in terms of achieving new educational goals and challenges (Roque Herrera et al., 2020).

The need of adults for continuous personal growth and professional development, as well as the need of organizations for new strategies to develop, modernize, and promote their human resources, has motivated scholars to search for both deeper motivations and appropriate learning methods in this particular age group (Kourkouta et al., 2021).

Many learning theories have been developed in adult education over the last forty years: behavioral, social, humanistic, constructivist, cognitive, etc. These theories are based on

social-psychological theories of learning and involve disciplines other than education, such as psychology, sociology, politics, and neuropsychology (Chuang, 2021; Knowles, 1973; Mukhalalati & Taylor, 2019).

More generally, there is a general controversy among theorists (both past and present) about the delimitation of the interpretation of learning, which began in earnest in the mid-20th century. Some argue that learning is associated with the development, skills, and potential of individuals.

Others focus on cognitive development, whereas educational psychologists argue that learning is a broad process influenced by the wider socio-economic environment. However, most affirm that learning is a complex anthropocentric process in which the individual defines, directs, shapes, justifies, and controls it through his or her behavior (Knowles, 1973). In contemporary literature, adult learning theory focuses on the study of the concepts of knowledge and information, perception, reflection, metacognition, and memory (Mukhalalati & Taylor, 2019).

### **Adult Continuing Education in Health**

In several countries, updating the knowledge and professional skills of health professionals is mandatory to maintain their professional license and ongoing practice. In some of these countries, participation in these programs is subject to a certain number of hours of training and attendance, thorough monitoring of participation, and a quota (graded) (Tran et al., 2014). In others, participation is not compulsory and is not monitored, and mere membership of associations or professional chambers is sufficient to obtain a license and practice the profession in question. The prevalence of great heterogeneity about national frameworks and strategies of CVE and CVD between countries both between countries with identical Health Support Systems (HSS) and those with different HSS at the global level is due to and highlights the different national policies and trends applied (Cadorin et al., 2012; Collin et al., 2012; Sajjadnia et al., 2015; Teekens et al., 2018) and in a broader sense, reflects the socio-economic context and culture of countries.

Pharmacists in the United States of America (U.S.A.) in all 50 states, including the federal districts of Columbia, Guam, and Puerto Rico, are required to complete specific hours of CPE to renew their license to practice (Tran et al., 2014).

Mandatory accreditation in medicine in China and CPE for all specialties in the field began as a national strategy in 2013 and culminated in 2020, after being internationally recognized as an accreditation standard body by the World Federation for Medical Education. Physician CPE in China is characterized by excellence in terms of organization, standards, and implementation of innovative forms of CPE across the medical profession, setting the bar for lifelong learning reform at the highest levels internationally (Wang, 2021; Wu et al., 2021).

Registered medical practitioners in Australia for renewal of their license to practice from January 2023 will be required to complete a minimum of 50 h of CPE per year in activities with a requirement to measure their performance and outcomes, tailored to their purpose and individual development needs (Medical Board of Australia, n. d.). Similarly, for the corps of nurses and midwives in Australia since 2015, there has been a mandatory requirement of 20 h of attendance in CPE programs, whereas in New Zealand, the requirements for accreditation of nurses include a mandatory 60 h of attendance over three years (Teekens et al., 2018).

Similarly, a report by the National Nursing Research Unit of the UK, Northern Europe, and North Africa confirms that CPE for health professionals through any form is undoubtedly both a personal investment (self-improvement, achievement of personal goals) and an organizational one (enhancing competition, higher quality of health services, cost reduction, patient satisfaction, patient-centred health). However, in addition to the mandatory revalidation of their professional status, this report indicates that policy making for CPE should include new opportunities for the personal development of human resources, reflecting their specific needs and the recognition of their contribution and special

role through payback (e.g. rewards) (Rafferty et al., 2015).

From the above, the existence of different types of health professionals' CPE is the result of the confluence of the trends and requirements of the vertical level of management with the needs and expectations of the employees themselves. By extension and through the CPE, the demands of modernizing social care and protecting public health are also projected, which vary by country and policy (Mlambo et al., 2021).

### **Benefits of CPE programs**

The benefits of implementing CPE programs are multiple not only for adult employees but also for the organizations themselves and, most importantly, for public health. In particular:

#### ***For employees:***

- Broadening future opportunities for professional rehabilitation through networking and interdisciplinary partnerships and achievements
- Improving learning skills, assimilating existing and new knowledge, and adopting new practices
- Strengthen vision and focus on professional self-improvement
- Enhancing and updating professional skills and performance practices
- Personal satisfaction and self-assurance through improved service delivery and positive feedback and recognition from clients

#### ***For organizations:***

- Innovation in healthcare: high standards of strategic development strategies and workforce agility
- Increase productivity by promoting employee motivation and specialization - achieve organizational goals
- Promoting the organization's training culture
- Enhancing the company's reputation for attracting customers
- Reducing absenteeism

- Highly vigorous advantage of the organization in the industry
- Changing the organizational culture from the individual to the whole
- Quality assurance
- Improve inter-professional collaboration
- Increase in staff motivation and morale

#### **For Public Health:**

- Strengthens the professional status of professionals involved in health promotion
- Promotes research and evidence-based practice, thus increasing professional recognition
- Provides health policy makers with tangible evidence of professional commitment to achieving high quality health services. (Allen et al, 2020? Association for Health Promotion Ireland, n. d.; London School of Business and Finance, 2019; Teekens et al, 2018).

**Conclusions:** The health sector faces multiple unexpected and ongoing challenges that have serious implications for healthcare globally. Despite these challenges, health professionals must maintain and redefine their knowledge and skills through continuous professional development. Knowledge and proper implementation of evidence-based practice by health professionals is not only necessary but also imperative. Maintaining and continuously developing their skills and knowledge through lifelong learning can improve self-efficacy, resilience, health literacy and health-related behaviors, and improve healthcare outcomes. To achieve this, organizations should invest in and prioritize the promotion of continuing professional development for health professionals through educational programs.

#### **References**

- Allen, L. M., Hay, M., Armstrong, E., & Palermo, C. (2020). Applying a social theory of learning to explain the possible impacts of continuing professional development (CPD) programs. *Medical Teacher*, 42(10), 1140–1147.
- Association for Health Promotion Ireland. (n.d.). Continuing Professional Development. Retrieved December 21, 2021, from <https://ahpi.ie/professional-registration/cpd>
- Beaumont, C., Stainton, R. (2016). RCN Factsheet: Continuing Professional Development (CPD) for nurses working in the United Kingdom (UK). United Kingdom.
- Cadorin, L., Suter, N., Dante, A., Williamson, S. N., Devetti, A., & Palese, A. (2012). Self-directed learning competence assessment within different healthcare professionals and amongst students in Italy. *Nurse Education in Practice*, 12(3), 153–158. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.nepr.2011.10.013>
- Chuang, S. (2021). The Applications of Constructivist Learning Theory and Social Learning Theory on Adult Continuous Development. *Performance Improvement*, 60(3), 6–14. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pfi.21963>
- Collin, K., van der Heijden, B., & Lewis, P. (2012). Continuing professional development. *International Journal of Training and Development*, 16(3), 155–163.
- Dymock, D., & Tyler, M. (2018). Towards a more systematic approach to continuing professional development in vocational education and training. *Studies in Continuing Education*, 40(2), 198–211.
- Farlex (2012). The Free Dictionary. <https://www.thefreedictionary.com/>
- Fukada, M. (2018). Nursing Competency: Definition, Structure and Development. *Yonago Acta Medica*, 61(1), 1–7.
- Ioannidou, A. (2014). The Adoption of an International Education Policy Agenda at National Level: Conceptual and Governance Issues. In G. K. Zarifis & M. N. Gravani (Eds.), *Lifelong learning book series: Vol. 19. Challenging the 'European Area of Lifelong Learning': A critical response / edited by George K. Zarifis, Maria N. Gravani* (pp. 203–215). Springer. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-7299-1\\_18](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-7299-1_18)
- Khiat, H. (2015). Measuring Self-Directed Learning: A Diagnostic Tool for Adult Learners. *Journal of University Teaching & Learning Practice*, 12(2). <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1072396.pdf>
- Knowles, M. (1973). *The Adult Learner: A Neglected Species*. Gulf Publishing Company. <https://api.taylorfrancis.com/content/books/mono/download?identifiername=doi&identifiervalue=10.4324/9781315816951&type=googlepdf>
- Koukourikos, K., Tsaloglidou, A., Kourkouta, L., Papathanasiou, I., Iliadis, Ch., Frantzana, A., Panagiotou, A. (2021). Simulation in Clinical Nursing Education. *Acta Informatica Medica*, 29(1), 15 – 20.



- Kourkouta, L., Aysegul Yildirim, K., Koukourikos, K., Iliadis, Ch., Ouzounakis, P., Tsaloglidou, A., (2021). Leadership and Teamwork in Nursing. *Journal of Healthcare Communications*, 6(2), 2
- Kourkouta, L., Iliadis, Ch., Akram, M., Pantelidou, P., Sapountzi-Krepia, D., Krepia, V., Leontaridou, J., (2021). Continuing Education and Incentives for Nurses. *International Journal of Caring Sciences*, 14(2), 1533 – 1538.
- Krespani, M., Tsaloglidou, A., Koukourikos, K., Ouzounakis, P., Iliadis, Ch., Krepia, V., Kaptanoglu, A.Y., Kourkouta, I., (2021). Educational Needs and Motivations for Lifelong Learning of Nurses. *International Journal of Caring Sciences*, 14(3), 1686 – 1696.
- London School of Business and Finance. (2019). What is the Purpose of Continuing Professional Development (CPD)? <https://www.lsbfi.org.uk/blog/news/education-careers/what-is-the-purpose-of-continuing-professional-development-cpd>
- Manley, K., Martin, A., Jackson, C., Wright, T. (2018). A realist synthesis of effective continuing professional development (CPD): A case study of healthcare practitioners' CPD. *Nurse Education Today*, 69, 134–141.
- Medical Board of Australia. (n.d.). (2021). Registration standard: Continuing professional development: Effective from: 1 January 2023. Retrieved December 21, 2021, from <https://www.medicalboard.gov.au/registration-standards.aspx>
- Mlambo, M., Silén, C., McGrath, C. (2021). Lifelong learning and nurses' continuing professional development, a metasynthesis of the literature. *BMC Nursing*, 20(1), 62. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12912-021-00579-2>
- Mukhalalati, B. A., Taylor, A. (2019). Adult Learning Theories in Context: A Quick Guide for Healthcare Professional Educators. *Journal of Medical Education and Curricular Development*, 6, 2382120519840332. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2382120519840332>
- OECD (Ed.). (2012). Lifelong Learning and Adults: The OECD perspective [Special issue]. Paris: OECD.
- OECD. (2021a). OECD Skills Outlook 2021: Learning for Life. Paris. <https://doi.org/10.1787/0ae365b4-en>
- Rafferty, A. M., Xyrichis, A., & Caldwell, C. (2015). Post-graduate education and career pathways in nursing: a policy brief. London. King's College London.
- Roque Herrera, Y., Zalagaz Sánchez, M. L., Valdivia-Moral, P., Marín-Marín, J.-A., & Alonso García, S. (2020). Active Methodologies in the Training of Future Health Professionals: Academic Goals and Autonomous Learning Strategies. *Sustainability*, 12(4), 1485. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su12041485>
- Sajjadnia, Z., Sadeghi, A., Kavosi, Z., Zamani, M., & Ravangard, R. (2015). Factors affecting the nurses' motivation for participating in the in-service training courses: A case study. *J Health Man & Info*, 2(1), 21–26.
- Stauvermann, P., Kumar, R. (2018). Adult Learning, Economic Growth and the Distribution of Income. *Economies*, 6(1), 11. <https://doi.org/10.3390/economies6010011>
- Tachtsoglou, K., Iliadis, Ch., Frantzana, A., Papatthanasiou, I.V., Mantzaris, D., Kourkouta, L., (2021). Modern Lifelong teaching strategies in nursing education. *International Journal of Caring Sciences*, 14(1), 781 – 786.
- Teekens, P., Wiechula, R., & Cusack, L. (2018). Perceptions and experiences of nurses and midwives in continuing professional development: A systematic review protocol. *JBIC Database of Systematic Reviews and Implementation Reports*, 16(9), 1758–1763.
- Teekens, P., Wiechula, R., & Cusack, L. (2018). Perceptions and experiences of nurses and midwives in continuing professional development: A systematic review protocol. *JBIC Database of Systematic Reviews and Implementation Reports*, 16(9), 1758–1763.
- Tran, D., Tofade, T., Thakkar, N., & Rouse, M. (2014). Us and international health professions' requirements for continuing professional development. *American Journal of Pharmaceutical Education*, 78(6), 129.
- van der Burgt, S. M. E., Kusurkar, R. A., Wilschut, J. A., Tjin A Tsoi, S. L. N. M., Croiset, G [Gerda], & Peerdeman, S. M. (2018). Motivational Profiles and Motivation for Lifelong Learning of Medical Specialists. *The Journal of Continuing Education in the Health Professions*, 38(3), 171–178.
- Wang, W. (2021). Medical education in china: Progress in the past 70 years and a vision for the future. *BMC Medical Education*, 21(1), 453.
- Wu, D., Guo, M., & Xu, C. (2021). The Development of Continuing Medical Education in China. *Creative Education*, 12(01), 203–211. <https://doi.org/10.4236/ce.2021.121015>
- Ministry of National Education & Religious Affairs. (2006). Adult Education: 2. Theories and models of adult education. Athena. Ministry of National Education & Religious Affairs. <http://repository.edulll.gr/edulll/retrieve/2528/778.pdf>