

Learning on the job: Creating a plan for your professional development in pulmonary rehabilitation

In this episode I want to talk about redefining what we mean by professional development. I was inspired to create this episode after listening to a similar one by Katie Linder, whose podcast is actually dedicated to professional development for academics. I realized there were many similarities with what she was talking about and what health care professionals could consider in terms of planning their professional development.

One thing that Katie said that really resonated with me is that we can get stuck thinking of professional development as something that is always very formal and very expensive. We may especially think this way if our professional development is measured in terms of metrics such as continuing medical education or CMEs. If we are expected to accumulate so many CMEs in a given year, then we may get caught up in the idea that the only professional development opportunities that really have value are the ones that have been validated by bodies that determine CME credits. And so those are important, for sure, we want to have certain types of things we learned, accredited or vetted in some way, we'd be wrong to think that there weren't other things we could do to keep up our professional practice, and our lives as a health care professional working in pulmonary rehabilitation really keeping up to speed with what is happening out there in terms of knowledge and research and best practices.

Especially now, with COVID19 we find that conferences are cancelled, and we can't travel to ones even if they weren't cancelled. But I think the interesting thing is that a lot of these conference organizers are starting to figure out new ways of delivering their content. For example, the European Respiratory Conference in 2020 was a fraction of the usual cost and it was all virtual. Other conferences were the same. When you start to think about the lower cost, no travel, no accommodation, no meal expenses, there are a lot of cost savings for us as health care professionals when we think about going to conferences. I'm a regular conference go-er, as usually I'm attending meetings attached to those conferences as well as presenting my research. But I'm also hopeful that some of these virtual conference options will stay after COVID19. One unexpected benefit is I'm actually attending other conferences I would not normally attend because it is more affordable, and I do not have to take as much time to travel to these places. So I have gone to one on teaching, and I have gone to another on health services delivery. Not having to travel has ended up being a gift and opened the door to be a part of other conferences in other content areas.

But conferences and courses are probably the most expensive ways to gain knowledge and skills in pulmonary rehab. But there are many other options available, and I'd like to touch on some of these now. Hopefully some will be a good fit for you, and a few of these ideas come from Katie Linders podcast actually. I link to her podcast in the show notes if you're curious about her show.

Reading is probably the most accessible way to gain knowledge, so let's start with thinking about reading. But reading and talking about it, even better, are two great ways to gain

increased knowledge & understanding on the pulmonary rehab. I've done a couple of journal clubs on this podcast (and there will certainly be more to come) and I also had an episode where I talked about how you can start your own journal club, and I will link to that as well. Reading and talking doesn't always change your practice, it does not really translate into improvements in clinical practice, of course, but I do find it helpful as a starting point to be current in what the major research areas are in pulmonary rehab. There are some things related to reading that you can also do, you might not know but you can actually subscribe to individual journal's tables of contents, which are sent to your email every time a new issue comes out. I find that even looking through those tables of contents allow me to get an overview of what's being published. You can also click on the link and go to the paper if you have access to it, so many of these are becoming open access now, so there are really not too many barriers to be able to get those articles. Some good journals to get the tables of contents that I have found to be very interesting and often have pulmonary rehab content would be the European Respiratory Journal, Annals of the American Thoracic Society, Physical Therapy, the American Journal of Cardiovascular and Pulmonary Rehabilitation, and Thorax. These are all journals that often publish articles that are very relevant to pulmonary rehab, and I believe for all of them you can get a table of contents subscription to your email. I'll link to these in the show notes.

Another source of information for you of course is, well, podcasts! I do find that there are not a lot of good pulmonary rehab podcasts, I actually do not know of any other than this one, but there are some good pulmonary related podcasts for sure, and we can definitely learn a lot about the larger field of healthcare as well from podcasts, which I find is quite valuable. We don't want to get too narrow in our learning, and only consider things that are specific to pulmonary rehab, or even pulmonary in general. Some examples, in addition to the podcast by Katie Linder, if you are in the academic area - I've also really enjoyed the old episodes of the CraikCast, the podcast from the past editor of the journal Physical Therapy, and there are also other podcasts on that journal's website. The American Thoracic Society has several podcasts, and if you go onto their website, there are about 10 to 12 podcasts that you can subscribe to. Some are related specifically to articles in their journals, and others are based on clinical questions, so this is definitely worth checking out.

And, like I mentioned, you do not necessarily just need to focus on pulmonary rehab, you may also be interested in questions related to health care in general. For example, a good one that I like is called "White Coat, Black Art", and this is a Canadian podcast that describes itself as "an original and provocative show demystifying the world of medicine." The host is Dr. Brian Goldman, he is an ER physician, and he structures his show as an exploration of the culture of medicine and the health care system from the perspective of health care professionals. So, they are talking about COVID-19, they are talking about burnout, they are talking about the patient-practitioner therapeutic relationship – really all different types of topics that are very relevant for those of us who are working in pulmonary rehab, so I would suggest checking that one out.

I was thinking about podcasts, and thinking about why I like them, and I think that one thing I like about podcasts is that it really uses a different part of my brain, and it offers an opportunity for learning at times when I'm into it, but just not able to sit down and read or

attend a session. I find in the mornings when out I'm running, I'll listen to a podcast for the first part of my run. If there's something that I'll want to make note of, I'll dictate a quick note in my phone as I am running. I learn a lot, and I think a lot when I'm listening to a podcast, sometimes even more than when I'm reading. So, I would suggest that you might find podcasts as an opportunity to listen to something while you are commuting or you are out for a walk, and it just gets your mind thinking about different things when you are out and about. Similarly, you might find TEDtalks to be helpful. Personally, I haven't quite got into the TEDtalk world myself, but there are so many short ones now in so many aspects of health that you may find that another option as well.

Similarly, there are webinars available that are free to everyone. Again, I'd encourage you to go to the American Thoracic Society Pulmonary Rehabilitation Assembly website for webinars. Your own respiratory society may have webinars regularly put on. If they don't, maybe there is a way to ask them if they would consider it. So many organizations have Zoom licenses now that hosting a webinar is much more feasible, and it is not the big technological challenge that it used to be. You could even suggest speakers. Again, it is much more possible to host a speaker then before when we had to pay for people to travel and accommodations, now with things more online, it is quite easy to arrange for a speaker from another country. And many new pulmonary rehabilitation researchers are looking for opportunities to speak. So there may be a perfect opportunity for both your society and people out there looking for these opportunities to work together.

So these are some options for gaining new knowledge. Now I want to talk about the planning part of this. You could listen to all of these things, sign up for courses or conferences, start a journal club. But this idea of professional development is to actually *develop*. So to do this effectively, you really do need a plan. But how to go about it?

I would encourage you to start by making a simple list of what you feel you want to tackle in terms of your professional development and learning. Remember, this isn't an exercise in ways to feel bad about yourself, and that you have this long list of things that you think you should know. The list of things we want to learn will always be larger and longer than the time we have. But I do think it is helpful to make a detailed and specific list. Then, think about what you want to tackle in the coming period. If you like long-term plans, think about what you'd like to achieve in the coming year. But you might prefer something shorter term, so then think of those items in terms of the next month or so. You may find this process really helpful if you have other members of the PR team going through it too or another program you are networked with. It can be a program professional development planning session, not just one for you. And also when you are thinking about those specific things you would like to learn or understand, decide what exactly do you hope to achieve? Is it increased awareness, knowledge, or actual clinical skill or technique that you feel like you need to know? Do you want to learn more about exercise prescription? If so, what exactly do you feel like you're lacking? Would you like to add some other topics to your curriculum but don't feel qualified on the subject? Are you interested in a new outcome measure but not sure how it works? So, think about the specifics about what you are hoping to achieve.

Next, do some research. Are there papers, podcasts, courses, webinars, online videos or talks you could access? Do you know of experts who might be able to give a talk, in-service, or workshop to your PR program? If it's a hands-on skill, who else knows it that could teach you? Or can you teach yourself if those resources are available? These are different things to think about in terms of trying to figure out where you can get the information and what you are specifically looking for.

Then, organize your schedule. You may have time for learning built into your work schedule. If so, fantastic- then you really do need to plan out how you'll use that time, and if others can learn with you, that would be great. For most of us, though, our professional development occurs outside of our working hours and so you really do need to schedule what you are going to do, and when, and commit that time.

Finally, it's important to reflect on what you've learned, will what you learned support your clinical practice, what other things has learning this topic uncovered, that you might need to think about and plan for. And also very importantly, if you weren't able to achieve the goal you set for yourself around professional development, maybe you're really overworked, and just trying to get through the day, then that's okay too. See if adding any of these suggestions feels like a way forward, and continue the planning process so that when you do have the time, you'll be ready. Even listening to this podcast, or any other podcast, might feel like a win for you! But the planning, and trying out some of these resources and reflecting on what you learned might give you a sense of control at a time when so much feels out of our control. Our ability to acquire new knowledge has expanded in terms of the resources that are out there, so much beyond the dusty journal in the hospital library. So it's all about experimenting with what will work for you. And keeping track of it, as a record for yourself, and perhaps for others who may be inspired by your planning and what you are trying to undertake.

I hope this episode has given you some ideas about planning your own professional development. Please have a look at some of the links I've provided, hopefully you'll find them interesting and informative too.

Until next time, keep well and keep moving. Bye for now.