

Evaluation of chiropractic registrants' responses to the first aid questions posed, and first aid activities undertaken, for the 2019/2020 Continuing Professional Development (CPD) return

Abridged report of a study carried out by the Royal College of Chiropractors (RCC) on behalf of the General Chiropractic Council (GCC)

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Following the inquest, in November 2019, into the death of a patient in a chiropractic clinic in York (referred to in this report as the 'York incident'), the Coroner asked the GCC to consider making first aid training a mandatory requirement for registrants.

In a Bulletin issued in January 2020, the GCC informed registrants they must develop competencies in recognising, assessing and managing emergency conditions that may be encountered in chiropractic settings¹. In February 2020, registrants were informed that, in September 2020 as part of their annual CPD submission to the GCC, each chiropractor would need to provide information on their first aid knowledge and skills and the steps taken so they are assured of their competence to administer first aid should the need arise². Subsequent GCC guidance, issued in March 2020, explained the GCC's expectations that chiropractors would take responsibility to ensure they are prepared to administer first aid in the event of a clinical emergency, consider their own first aid knowledge and skills, and determine whether or not they need to undertake further specific first aid training, discussing experiences and concerns amongst peers, based on actual scenarios³.

1.2 Provision of first aid information in chiropractors' 2019/20 CPD return

As part of their CPD return for 2019/20, registrants were required to provide answers to two self-directed first aid questions. These were designed to prompt registrants to reflect on their own first aid knowledge and skills, and the measures taken to assure themselves of their own competence to administer first aid on a patient should the need arise, as follows:

1. To what extent would my own first aid skills and competencies enable me to administer appropriate first aid on a patient, should the need arise?
2. What measures have I taken, or do I plan to take, to ensure my current and ongoing skills and competencies are up to date?

1.3 Analysis of CPD returns

The RCC was commissioned to undertake a study of registrants' anonymised CPD returns. This was designed to address three main questions:

- To what extent do chiropractors feel they have appropriate skills and competencies in first aid?
- To what extent do chiropractors' reflections on their first aid skills and competencies, and any measures they have taken to address them, provide insight into whether these are appropriate to their situation?
- How has the first aid guidance and CPD requirements introduced by the GCC influenced chiropractors' first aid training?

In order to address these questions, the study included the following objectives:

- Undertake a qualitative analysis of the answers of all registrants to the question: 'To what extent would my own First Aid skills and competencies enable me to administer appropriate First Aid on a patient, should the

need arise?' (Question 1) in order to explore whether skills and competencies were reflected upon and evaluated by registrants.

- Undertake a qualitative analysis of the answers of all registrants to the question: 'What measures have I taken, or do I plan to take, to ensure my current and ongoing skills and competencies are up to date?' (Question 2) in order to explore what measures were taken and/or planned by registrants.
- Undertake a review and qualitative/quantitative analysis of all cases of first aid CPD activity specifically reported among registrants, including qualitative analysis of reflective comments on learning need.

2. Summary of findings

2.1 Analysis of responses to Question 1 - To what extent would my own first aid skills and competencies enable me to administer appropriate first aid on a patient, should the need arise?

Question 1 was designed to prompt registrants to reflect on and quantify ('to what extent') their first aid skills and competencies in the context of administering appropriate care to a patient, if needed.

2.1.1 Themes identified among responses to Question 1

Four main themes were identified among the responses, as follows:

- Competent: Conclusion of confidence/competence following previous training.
e.g I have kept up to date with training, attending sessions in person and online in accordance with the guidelines for safe practice. I consider myself competent to administer first aid in my clinical practice.
- Training history: Description of training undertaken but without direct reference to competence.
e.g I attended an Emergency First Aid In the Clinic course in February 2020. I regularly review the content and have a review page of the most important areas readily accessible in my clinic at all times. I also have a comprehensive First Aid Kit in my clinic.
- Abilities: Description of first aid knowledge/skills/abilities, implying competence.
e.g My first aid skills will enable to keep calm and carry out the appropriate protocols with the safety of the subject, others and myself. This includes assessing the situation, calling for help and prioritising the appropriate treatment.
- Training need: Concludes/implies need for more training.
e.g I feel slightly under prepared/trained for a number of potential first aid situation that may occur in the office. My last first aid training was some time ago.

Note that:

- 91.8% (3046/3318) of registrants expressed competence/confidence in their abilities to provide first aid if required to do so **and/or** described the training undertaken/their first aid abilities, implying competence/confidence.
- 14.4% (478/3318) of registrants identified a need or wish to undertake first aid training.

2.1.2 Degree of reflection

Responses to Question 1 that either specifically referred to personal competence/confidence, summarised the registrant's skills or abilities and/or identified a need for training, were deemed to have constituted *reflective* answers to a greater or lesser extent.

The responses provided by 23.1% (766/3318) of registrants relating to the training they had undertaken were descriptive, not reflective. These responses did not directly address the issue of personal skill or competence, although competence was implied.

2.1.3 Registrants' insight into competence and relevance

Whilst a high proportion of registrants indicated or implied competence to administer first aid when required (91.8%, section 2.1.1), themes emerged among their responses to Question 1 indicating variability in terms of the relevance of their skills and competencies to their clinical role. The majority of registrants' responses to Question 1 referred to general first aid competencies, abilities and training. There was an apparent emphasis on the importance

of competence in administering CPR and/or defibrillator use (34.%; 1133/3318) and a smaller emphasis on recognising/managing stroke (6.4%; 212/3318).

Many registrants referred to their first aid competencies/abilities/training in the context of other former or concurrent professions or social activities, rather than in the context of their chiropractic practice.

2.1.4 Registrants' perceptions of the nature of first aid

A small number of responses to Question 1 suggested a lack of appreciation of the nature of the role of a first aider as distinct from chiropractic practice, for example:

On a day to day basis we are assessing patients wellbeing and looking out for signs of distress, illness and underlying pathology. Unfortunately I have found two cases of cancer on x-ray this year...

2.2 Analysis of registrants' responses to Question 2 - What measures have I taken, or do I plan to take, to ensure my current and ongoing skills and competencies are up to date?

Question 2 was designed to prompt registrants to think about and explain the measures taken or planned to assure and maintain appropriate first aid skills and competencies.

2.2.1 Themes identified among responses to Question 2

Four main themes or types of response were identified among registrants' answers:

- Current competence: Current first aid training up to date prior to current CPD year (inc. current CPD certificate) or have taken measures to address competence this CPD year
e.g. I have completed 3 courses concerned with first aid this year: 1) AED/CPR 2) First aid review for your practice 3) First aid for life (covering specific medical emergencies in a chiropractic setting).
- Plan in place: Plan to undertake some training, but no indication of prior or continuing training
e.g. I plan to read up on the latest guidelines and I'm in the process of arranging a first aid day course with some colleagues
- Ongoing plans: Long term plan to stay up to date with first aid training
e.g. I renew my first aid certificate every 3 years and it is due for renewal in 2021. It's important to update as first aid actions change regularly.
- No clear plan: No apparent forward plan to achieve/maintain competence
e.g. None, as the course I was due to take this March was cancelled.

Note that:

- 78.8% (2615/3318) of registrants indicated they had current competence.
- 98.3% (3262/3318) of registrants indicated they had a current first aid certificate **and/or** had undertaken recent training/measures to ensure they have first aid skills/competencies **and/or** had plans to undertake training to address/maintain their skills/competencies

Of those with plans to undertake training/further training, 14% (465/3318) specifically referred to a policy to maintain a first aid training certificate in perpetuity.

2.2.2 Appropriateness of responses to Question 2

Registrants took a range of different approaches to answering Question 2:

- Descriptive account: A small number of registrants indicated they had undertaken some recent training to address their skills and competencies by giving a descriptive account of the course they had decided to undertake.
e.g. I have completed two first aid courses (a basic course covering the unconscious victim, burns and scolds, bleeding and shock) and an advanced course covering heart attack, anaphylaxis, stroke, diabetes, seizures...

- Health & safety measures: Some registrants focused on health and safety measures implemented but not their own first aid skills and competencies.
e.g. I bought some aspirin for the clinics and fire blankets protection for the clinics.
- Team focus: These registrants focused on the skills and competencies of their team rather than their own first aid skills and competencies.
e.g. Our clinic has already had a team meeting to discuss all first aid items needed in Clinic. Have a new updated first aid box in an identified location.
- Other roles: These registrants referred to first aid skills and competencies related to other roles rather than focusing on those required for their chiropractic practice
e.g. I plan to continue my role both in the fire service and with SWAST through which I receive regular training and assessment.

2.2.3 Impact of COVID-19 and online first-aid training

The coronavirus pandemic was a clear, limiting factor in terms of chiropractors' access to first aid training during 2020; 19.1% (634/3318) of registrants made specific reference to an inability to access face-to-face first aid training due to the pandemic.

Of those who undertook/had planned to undertake first aid training during the 2019/2020 CPD year, 34% (1127/3318) referred to online training as the mode of instruction accessed with the vast majority of those indicating the need or an intention to undertake face-to-face training when available.

2.2.4 Training providers and specificity of training

25.3% (840/3318) of registrants indicated they had undertaken, or planned to undertake, training provided by trainers known to have provided first aid training tailored to include the first aid scenarios likely to be faced by chiropractors/MSK healthcare practitioners.

2.3 First-aid-related CPD activities specifically reported by registrants

2.3.1 Extent of first aid-related training

A proportion of registrants decided to include first-aid-related CPD activities among those CPD activities for which hours were claimed towards their 2019/20 CPD requirement.

A total of 13900 CPD activities were reported by 3318 registrants in their collective CPD returns for the 2019/20 CPD year. In relation to these 13900 activities:

- 1038 were identified as first-aid-related learning undertaken by 837 registrants
- 666 registrants reported one first-aid-related CPD activity
- 171 registrants reported between two and five first-aid-related activities
- 236 registrants recorded first-aid-related CPD for their *learning cycle*
- The first-aid-related activities reported varied in length between 0.5 and 32 hours

Of the 1038 first-aid-related learning activities undertaken:

- 469 activities were learning alone, 569 learning with others
- Of the learning alone activity reported, 359/469 related only to online courses/webinars; the remainder was reading/personal research or a mixture.
- Of the learning with others activity reported, 260/569 related to (presumably live) online courses/webinars, with the remainder mainly face-to-face training courses/discussions.
- 40% (415/1038) of the learning activities reported related to courses tailored to the needs of chiropractors

2.3.2 Registrants' reported reasons for undertaking first-aid-related CPD activity

88% (913/1038) of first-aid-related CPD activity was reportedly undertaken due to a learning need identified through self-reflection or prompted by the GCC/knowledge of the York incident. Almost a third of the activity undertaken was prompted by a perception that the training was compulsory for registrants.

4. Discussion

4.1 Extent to which chiropractors' first aid skills and competencies are appropriate to their role and up-to-date

The GCC's education standards require that graduates are able to 'describe how to manage and reduce risks in all aspects of the practice setting', which 'would normally include being able to respond to emergencies by following standard first aid training'⁴, and it is understood that all UK-trained chiropractic undergraduates undertake appropriate first aid training prior to commencing their clinical internships. However, first aid skills and competencies are known to deteriorate⁵ and the expert advice regarding first aid practices and protocols changes over time, so it is important for any first-aider to reflect and have insight into their ability to provide effective first aid in the event that this is required, and to recognise the need to keep their skills and competencies current.

It was encouraging to note in this study that 91.8% of registrants' responses to Question 1 expressed or implied confidence in their abilities to administer first aid having repeatedly undertaken training in the past or having undertaken recent training. 14.41% of registrants demonstrated insight into their lack of appropriate skills/competencies/confidence, and/or identified a need to undertake training (section 2.1.1).

There was evidence to suggest that many registrants' former first aid training and experience is generic and relates to activity in a non-specific or non-clinical context (section 2.1.3). This might not be an issue in terms of provision of first aid appropriate for colleagues in the workplace, but it may indicate a lack of appreciation of the circumstances and scenarios specific to a clinical environment and the first aid training and competences required to address this. The responses to Question 2 indicated that a very high proportion (98.3%) of chiropractors felt their first aid training was up to date or they had undertaken measures to ensure competence, and/or they had plans in place to address their skills/competencies (section 2.2.1). However, only 25.3% of the identified first-aid-related CPD activity registrants had undertaken or planned was provided by trainers known to provide training tailored to include the requirements of chiropractors (section 2.2.4). Moreover, only 40% (415/1038) of the first-aid-related learning activities reported in registrants' CPD returns for 2019/20 were courses tailored to the needs of chiropractors (section 2.3.1). Although these figures can only be considered an estimate of the proportion of registrants who undertook/planned specifically-tailored training, it does suggest that undertaking specific, tailored training is not currently the norm.

It should be noted that a significant proportion of the responses to Question 2 (19.1%) indicated registrants' difficulty accessing face-to-face training in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic (section 2.2.3) and analysis of the first-aid-related CPD activity that 837 of registrants recorded for the 2019/20 CPD year revealed that approximately 45% of this learning was undertaken alone and 76% related to online learning (section 2.3.1). It might reasonably be expected that access to tailored first aid training will improve significantly when national measures to combat the COVID-19 pandemic are relaxed.

4.2 GCC actions taken to improve first aid provision

Whilst Standard G1 in the GCC Code⁶ requires registrants to:

'keep your knowledge and skills up to date, taking part in relevant and regular learning and professional development activities that aim to maintain and develop your competence and improve your performance and the quality of your work.'

there is currently no specific, statutory requirement for registrants to be first-aid trained.

The Health and Safety (First-Aid) Regulations 1981 require employers to provide adequate and appropriate equipment, facilities and personnel to ensure their employees receive immediate attention if they are injured or taken ill at work. These Regulations apply to all workplaces including those with less than five employees and to the self-employed. What is 'adequate and appropriate', including whether trained first-aiders are needed, depends on the circumstances in the workplace and employers must carry out an assessment of first-aid needs. Although HSE strongly recommends that non-employees are included in an assessment of first-aid needs, and that provision is made for them, the Regulations do not place a legal duty on employers to do this⁷.

It is interesting to note, therefore, the effect that the GCC's actions in early 2020 to guide registrants regarding their first-aid responsibilities, and to require them to specifically reflect on their first aid competencies (section 2.3.2), has had. Chiropractic registrants are required to report 30 hours of CPD activity to the GCC each year^{8,9} and, whilst some choose to report much more than this, many are selective and do not record all of it. This means that any first-aid-related training undertaken may be under-reported in the context of CPD returns. However, 837 registrants included first-aid-related CPD activity in their 2019/20 CPD return (section 2.3.1), whereas only 41 registrants included first-aid-related CPD activity in their 2018/19 CPD return. This suggests that the actions taken by the GCC led to a significant increase in the amount of first aid training undertaken by chiropractors.

Registrant's reported reasons for undertaking first-aid-related CPD activity during the 2019/20 CPD year were, in more than 55% of cases, as a result of reflection on their learning needs, which may or may not have been a direct result of the GCC's actions, but 27% of registrants was as a result of a belief that the course they undertook was compulsory and/or a requirement of registration. A smaller proportion (5.4%) specifically referred to the York Incident (section 2.3.2) demonstrating clear insight into their learning needs.

5. Conclusions

The vast majority of chiropractic registrants feel they are competent to administer first aid, or imply this to be the case, having undertaken first aid training. Registrants' reflections on/descriptions of their first aid abilities suggest much of their competence and/or training is generic rather than tailored to their needs as clinicians who are in regular contact with the public.

The current COVID-19 pandemic impeded registrants' ability to access first aid training in 2020 and led to many undertaking online training rather than hands-on training.

The GCC's requirement for registrants to reflect on their first aid skills and competencies in the 2019/20 CPD return resulted in a notable focus on first aid in registrants' CPD considerations and activities in 2020 and led to providers developing tailored training courses. This is likely to have improved the relevance of registrants' first aid competences.

6. References

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