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Exploring the Professional Development Experiences of Academic and Industry Professionals Across the Career Path in the Field of Kinesiology

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Principle and Co-Investigators

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Throughout the span of a career, from its infancy to its retirement, professionals are in a constant state of learning. This process involves the “striving for, achieving and renewing of learning and the development of goals” (Friedman, 2013, p.14). This process of continuing professional development (CPD) has been shown to encompass both structured (i.e., formal) and unstructured (i.e., informal) activities (Friedman, 2013; Freidman & Phillips, 2004). Despite a general understanding of what could be considered CPD, it has been suggested that a universal definition for CPD does not exist, and in turn, professionals’ understanding of its purpose and importance may vary (Friedman & Phillips, 2004). CPD also has a number of known benefits such as increasing knowledge, confidence, competence, and job satisfaction (Friedman, 2013). Interestingly, despite the aforementioned benefits to CPD, limited research in the area of Kinesiology has explored the inner workings of CPD. Kinesiology is a “very broad and highly applied discipline” (O et al., 2016, p. 1), wherein students may pursue many different industry related career paths (e.g., physiotherapy, cardiac rehabilitation, sport management, sport psychology, physical activity or health promotion; Gledhill & Jamnik, 2009). Therefore, it is possible the ways in which these careers promote or encourage CPD may vary considerably (e.g., Freidman & Phillips, 2004). As such, the purpose of the current study was to explore how professionals in Kinesiology-related careers pursue and perceive CPD. More specifically, our objectives were to examine how Kinesiology-related professionals define and conceptualize CPD, how and where they pursue both formal and informal forms of CPD, and what they perceive as benefits to CPD. Participants included three industry professionals and five academics. Participants varied in their tenure in their positions, ranging from two months to 25 years of experience. Regarding the definition and conceptualization of CPD, participants perceived CPD as a “moving target” in which they feel responsible to engage in formal and informal professional development activities so that they can stay current with their field. Participants noted engaging in professional development activities as a result of being required to attend or due to personal self-interest. For example, participants explained that they would take the initiative to attend a professional development opportunity as a means to network and connect with future collaborators. CPD opportunities included a variety of activities such as conversations with peers, listening to presentations, attending workshops, receiving mentorship, reading materials, and self-reflecting. CPD benefits described by participants included learning job-specific skills (e.g., Excel, research methods), developing and growing their network of collaborators and friends, staying informed on the state of their field, and improving knowledge to differentiate themselves from their advisors. Findings from the present study increase the clarity of our understanding of CPD in the context of Kinesiology. Kinesiology students can use the findings from the present study to learn ways that they can engage in CPD throughout their professional careers. In doing so, they can increase opportunities to reap the benefits of CPD.