

Building Effective Professional Development Plans

Participant Handout · Faculty & Healthcare Providers

Name: _____	Date: _____
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WHAT IS A PDP, AND WHY IT MATTERS

A Professional Development Plan (PDP) is a short, written plan that connects your current performance to specific, evidence-based actions that close a gap or build a strength — within a defined time frame. It is grounded in real data, driven by SMART goals, and reviewed on a cycle rather than filed away once a year.

Participation in formal continuing education is associated with measurable gains in performance and patient or student outcomes (Cervero & Gaines, 2015; Davis et al., 1999). However, self-assessment alone is often inaccurate (Davis et al., 2006), which is why a strong PDP combines self-reflection with external data and feedback — what the literature calls “informed self-assessment” (Sargeant et al., 2010; Mann et al., 2011).

WHY PDPS OFTEN FAIL

- Motivation & commitment — people invest effort only when they believe it leads to a valued outcome (Vroom, 1964). Plans imposed from above undermine autonomy; goals aligned with personal values are pursued more persistently (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Sheldon & Elliot, 1999).
- Too general, not SMART — goals work when they are specific, appropriately challenging, accepted, and paired with feedback; vague aspirations fail on all four counts (Locke & Latham, 1990).
- One-off mentality — a single workshop or course rarely changes behavior on its own; lasting development is embedded in ongoing practice and community (Lave & Wenger, 1991).
- Lack of follow-through or accountability — plans often stall without a clear process, supervisor support, or deadlines (Holton et al., 2000).

THE SMART GOALS FRAMEWORK

S	Specific	Names the exact behavior or outcome.
M	Measurable	Includes a number, rate, or indicator to track.
A	Achievable	Realistic given time, resources, and skill level.
R	Relevant	Connects to role, priorities, or patient/student need.
T	Time-bound	Has a clear deadline or review date.

FACULTY VS. HEALTHCARE: QUICK REFERENCE

Element	Faculty	Healthcare Providers
Core domains	Teaching, scholarship, service & leadership	Clinical competency, patient safety, CE, teamwork
Example evidence-based strategy	Peer observation, SoTL, communities of practice	Simulation-based training, PDSA cycles, precepting
Typical review cadence	Annual, aligned to academic year	Quarterly, aligned to clinical / quality cycles

KEEPING YOUR PLAN ALIVE

- Set a review cadence — faculty: align to the academic year; healthcare: align to quarterly quality cycles.

- Name an accountability partner — a chair, mentor, supervisor, or peer who checks in, not just a self-review.
- Track one simple metric — the single number tied to your SMART goal, revisited at each check-in.
- Revise, don't restart — if a goal or strategy isn't working, adjust it. A PDP is a living document, not a contract.

Workshop Activities

Use the space below each activity to draft your own answers as we work through the session.

ACTIVITY 1 · 5 MIN

Self-Assessment & Gap Spotting

Goal: *Identify one real performance gap or growth area using your own data before writing any goal.*

1. Pull one piece of real evidence (evaluation, feedback, outcome data, audit).
2. Write down one gap it reveals.
3. Clarify the precise nature of the gap.
4. Share your gap with a partner in one sentence.

Your notes / answer:

ACTIVITY 2 · 5 MIN

Writing a SMART Goal

Goal: *Turn your gap into one SMART goal using the S-M-A-R-T checklist as a filter.*

1. Draft a first version of your goal in one sentence.
2. Run it through each SMART letter — revise anything vague.
3. Add a specific number and a specific date.
4. Read your goal aloud to a partner; ask “is this measurable?”

Your notes / answer:

ACTIVITY 3 · 5 MIN

Strategy Mapping

Goal: Match your SMART goal to an evidence-based strategy, not the first idea that comes to mind.

1. Classify your gap: skill, knowledge, or systems-level.
2. Match it to a strategy type (e.g., practice, CE, QI cycle, mentoring).
3. Name one specific resource or person who could support this strategy.
4. Write a one-line “how I’ll know it’s working” checkpoint.

Your notes / answer:

ACTIVITY 4 · 10 MIN

Break Out Session – Share Your Plan

Goal: Get another set of eyes on your goal and lock in an accountability check-in.

1. Exchange draft goals with a group.
2. Partner checks: is it Specific? Measurable? Time-bound?
3. Partner asks one clarifying question out loud.
4. Agree on a reasonable date to check in on progress.

Your notes / answer:
