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## **Program Evaluation - Ensuring Quality Distance Learning**

Terri works on development of continuing education courses for pharmacists, primarily for distance delivery. She holds the position of Director of Outreach Education at the Faculty of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences, University of Alberta. Her areas of interest include: distance education, learning in the workplace, self-directed learning, and program evaluation.

### **Learning Objectives**

At the end of this session participants should be able to:

1. Present definitions of program evaluation.
2. Introduce types, models and methods used in program evaluation.
3. Enable participants to reflect on previous experiences with program evaluation.
4. Motivate participants to explore ways of integrating program evaluation in their practice.

### **Abstract**

Evaluation is integral to the development and delivery process for distance learning. The definition of program evaluation depends upon many variables, including the intended use of the evaluation, evaluation methods, audiences, and in the case of education, the philosophy of education. Program evaluation differs from research by virtue of the purpose of data collection. Whereas basic scientific research is undertaken to discover new knowledge and test theories, program evaluation is undertaken to inform decisions, clarify options, identify improvements, and provide information about programs.

Evaluation can be categorized into two general types: formative and summative. Formative evaluation occurs throughout the development process, such as a needs assessment. Summative evaluation generally refers to the evaluation after the course is developed and delivered. Evaluation in continuing pharmacy education has historically been restricted to achievement testing and measurement of learner satisfaction -- both summative-type evaluations. To gauge the success of a distance education program, many experts in the practice of evaluation advocate the use of both formative and summative evaluations.

The Kirkpatrick Hierarchy of Evaluation model outlines four levels of evaluation that can encompass both formative and summative evaluation methods. The first level is very familiar to most continuing pharmacy educators and participants. It measures the

reaction of participants to gauge their satisfaction. The second level is concerned with the actual learning usually measured as new knowledge and skills that have been acquired. The third level is concerned with the transference of behavior to real-life settings. The fourth level measures the broad impact of the program on the wider community. Often, evaluation of continuing pharmacy education programs only encompasses aspects of level one.

In this presentation, the concept of program evaluation will be introduced. Examples of program evaluations will highlight types of evaluation, multi-level evaluation, and tools used in program evaluation.

### **Self Assessment Questions**

1. What is program evaluation?
2. What program evaluation activities do I utilize now in my practice?
3. What opportunities are there for me to further develop skills in program evaluation?

### **References**

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