

The university conference model: re-energising CPD

This paper describes the development of an innovative educational model that combines attendance at a major conference with accredited academic study known as the university conference model (UCM). This approach to continued professional development makes effective use of limited study leave and utilises the excellent facilities and learning resources available at this year's Wounds UK conference. The University of Hertfordshire and Wounds UK are working collaboratively to offer the university conference model as an alternative approach to academic study for busy practitioners.

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KEY WORDS

University conference model
Continuing professional development
Student-centred learning
Accreditation

Due to the severe financial cutbacks in the NHS, continuing professional development (CPD) is under serious threat as trusts which have overspent their budgets try to minimise expenditure by cutting training budgets. This year has seen a national reduction in numbers of health professionals taking up health-related courses in higher education and the situation is likely to become worse.

The demands on CPD have never been greater. Employers require quality education which prepares practitioners to achieve high standards of care, while enabling healthcare providers to achieve their strategic and operational objectives. Due to depleted staffing levels, releasing practitioners from their clinical duties is becoming increasingly difficult and as a result morale is low. Clinicians are

becoming increasingly restricted in their choice of professional education as they have neither the time nor resources to further their own personal development. The long-term implications of this situation will have a significant impact on the NHS' ability to provide an adequate service in the future.

University conference model

Health professionals are beginning to seek alternative approaches to professional development. This has been the driving force behind the development of an educational model that combines attendance at major conferences with accredited academic

study. This approach to professional education is known as the university conference model (UCM) (Figure 1) and originates from the author's experience of bringing students from the University of Hertfordshire to wound care conferences in Harrogate in the 1990s.

The UCM will be piloted at the Wounds UK conference in Harrogate on the 13–15th November 2006. A group of students will be facilitated by the University of Hertfordshire to study the accredited course 'Specialist Practice in Wound Management'. If successful they will then have the opportunity to study a further module at next year's

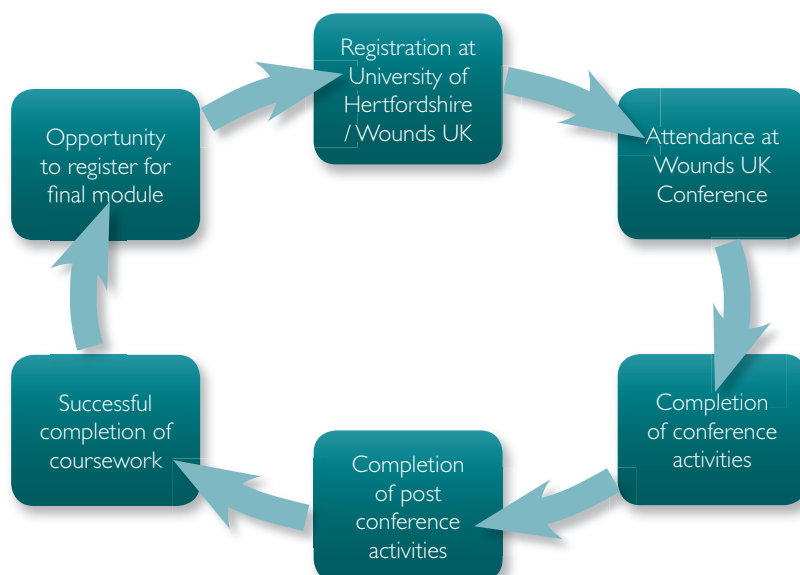


Figure 1. University conference model.

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Wounds UK conference and be eligible for the postgraduate certificate in Specialist Wound Management. Students have a maximum of five years from initial registration in which to gain sufficient credits for the postgraduate award.

The Wounds UK conference programme will be used to deliver the main taught component of the course 'Specialist Practice in Wound Management' (30 credits towards the final year of undergraduate study or a masters [3/M]) accredited by the University of Hertfordshire. The content and outcomes of the course will be matched against sessions and activities on the Wounds UK conference programme.

The conference brings together international experts in the field of wound healing and provides a dynamic platform for disseminating real world research, professional debate, networking opportunities and presentation of the latest practice developments. It will provide a unique educational environment that will present participating students with a challenging, analytical conference experience, from which they can develop personally and professionally and is one that would be difficult to replicate at an individual university. The educational opportunities available at the Wounds UK conference will allow students to explore the wider perspectives of wound management from an international viewpoint.

The UCM has arisen from a pragmatic desire to:

- ▶▶ Combine academic study with professional development activities
- ▶▶ Make effective use of limited study leave
- ▶▶ Enable maximum use of expert knowledge and skills
- ▶▶ Use excellent facilities and learning resources.

Wounds UK and the University of Hertfordshire are collaborating to implement the UCM to provide academic recognition to participating practitioners who wish to advance their specialist wound management knowledge and skills. Plans are under way for UCM to be

Table 1

Course content

Specialist Practice in Wound Management — module content

Managing wounds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prevalence and incidence of acute/chronic wounds Physiology of wound healing and tissue repair Optimal environment for healing Wound/skin assessment, differential diagnosis and referral criteria Assessment and management of wound infection Wound management, dressings, advanced wound management products and modalities
Psychosocial aspects of care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Impact of wounds on individuals and their families Factors affecting compliance with treatment
Wound management services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Structure and management of services Use of evidence-based practice/clinical guidelines Interdisciplinary, multiprofessional approach

Consolidating Specialist Practice — module content

Students will study a selection of topics from a broad professional/international perspective such as:

Specialist practice development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Health policy and professional influences affecting specialist practice Interprofessional working Development/implementation of policies, clinical guidelines Resource/risk management, business planning Professional standards, clinical audit and quality improvement Legal principles: liability, consent, complaint management
Clinical education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Creating and maintaining a positive learning environment Assessing learning in practice Strategies for effective health education Preparing for publication, conferences and public speaking

piloted at international conferences such as the European Wound Management Association Conference (EWMA) in Glasgow (2nd–4th May 2007).

The postgraduate certificate in Specialist Wound Management from the University of Hertfordshire comprises two compulsory modules:

- ▶▶ Specialist Practice in Wound Management (30 credits 3/M)
- ▶▶ Consolidating Specialist Practice (30 credits M [masters only])

Each course can be taken separately but students who successfully complete both modules will be awarded a postgraduate certificate in Specialist Wound Management.

Course delivery

Students will receive pre-course materials before the Wounds UK conference and will be required to access pre-conference activities on the morning of November 13th. This will provide the opportunity for students and academic staff to meet and discuss the planned conference activities. Participating students will be required to attend specific activities defined by the university curriculum such as:

- ▶▶ Plenary, parallel and free paper sessions
- ▶▶ Poster sessions
- ▶▶ Exhibition-related activities
- ▶▶ Workshops
- ▶▶ Social activities.

A unique study programme will be devised from sessions on the Wounds

UK conference programme together with additional learning activities which will make best use of the speakers who are contributing to the conference. Tutors will be available to provide group and individual student support during the conference. Taught presentations will be delivered by academic staff from the University of Hertfordshire and key opinion leaders in wound management, and will include the topics listed in *Table 1*. Time will be allowed within the programme for informal networking with peers and experts, and some post-conference activities, such as completion of conference evaluation and participation in group discussions using the university's intranet-managed learning system, will also be scheduled.

Registered students will be supported by the University of Hertfordshire's managed learning environment called STUDYnet which provides access to online lecture notes, handouts, reading lists, assignment briefings and other learning resources. Students can also access online tutorial support, participate in discussion groups and submit course work online.

The teaching and learning styles implicit in the UCM are centred on the philosophy of adult student-centred learning and include problem-based learning approaches. It is intended that the UCM will facilitate the development of professional attributes including utilisation of evidence-based knowledge, organisational and managerial skills, and educational skills in order to facilitate the implementation of best practice.

Students who wish to progress to a postgraduate certificate will be given the opportunity to register for the second part of the course 'Consolidating Specialist Practice' which will be delivered at next year's Wounds UK conference. Those who wish to continue their studies may transfer onto the MSc 'Advancing Practice in Tissue Viability' programme to access courses delivered at the University of Hertfordshire.

Assessment

Academic study involves student assessment of course outcomes and will vary depending on the specific

requirements of each course studied. For the course 'Specialist Practice in Wound Management', students will be expected to undertake a critical evaluation of patient-centred wound management practice. They will be expected to review the health needs of an individual patient using a case study approach and provide a rationale for care provided, together with a critical examination of the evidence base to support the chosen interventions. Submission of course work is normally within three months of the start of the course which gives the student time to integrate the taught component of their course with clinical practice.

Advantages of UCM

Today, most health-related university courses are modular and part-time in order to complement the student's existing work commitments and help facilitate the integration of theory with practice. The UCM takes full advantage of this curricula approach and could in future allow universities to run several courses at the same or at subsequent conferences so that students are able to study an academic award of longer duration. Overall advantages of the UCM include:

- ▶▶ Combining existing conference activities with accredited academic courses
- ▶▶ Uncompromised academic quality
- ▶▶ Increased student choice and participation
- ▶▶ University registration provides access to additional learning resources
- ▶▶ It fulfils adult learning and interprofessional agendas
- ▶▶ Students gain an independent academic award.

Conclusion

Education has a responsibility to facilitate change in clinical practice. The UCM aims to achieve this by encouraging the exchange of ideas from practitioners in different clinical environments to enhance understanding of other professional roles and promote interprofessional teamwork. Health professionals have a wealth of professional and life skills that need to be shared and acknowledged in a real world environment. The UCM provides an innovative approach to achieve this and offers health

Key Points

- ▶▶ Financial and time pressures are prompting healthcare professionals to find new ways to continue their professional development.
- ▶▶ The University of Hertfordshire and Wounds UK are collaborating to pilot the university conference model which combines attendance at major conferences with accredited academic study.
- ▶▶ UCM involves adult student-centred learning and problem-based learning.
- ▶▶ The Wounds UK conference programme will be used to deliver the main taught component of a course 'Specialist Practice in Wound Management'. Students will have five years from initial registration in which to gain sufficient credits for the postgraduate award.

professionals an alternative means of accessing accredited professional development while networking at a major professional conference. **WUK**

Students interested in registering for postgraduate study using the University Conference Model approach should contact Madeleine Flanagan, Principal Lecturer, Faculty Health and Human Sciences, University of Hertfordshire m.flanagan@herts.ac.uk She will be available at the Wounds UK conference at the Q&A session and can be contacted on 07736 660584 for further details of this or other tissue viability/ dermatology courses offered by the University of Hertfordshire.

Thanks to Smith & Nephew who are supporting the UCM by sponsoring the accommodation and subsistence of University of Hertfordshire-registered students attending this year's Wounds UK conference to study the module Specialist Practice in Wound Management.