

# Lifelong Learning in Healthcare: Mind, Body, Career

Reading time:

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Doctors are considered as one of the most highly regarded and trusted professions. This year's Professions Survey by Roy Morgan Research Institute<sup>1</sup> showed that 82% of Australians rate medical doctors "high" or "very high" for their ethics and honesty while 71% of participants held the same view for dentists. But being part of a respected profession can come with a heavy load.

Medical and dental healthcare practitioners often find themselves shouldering a towering workload with demanding responsibilities<sup>2</sup>, which can often lead to lethargy, lack of enthusiasm to invest in their professional development, and little time for self-care.

## What is self-care?

The [World Health Organisation \(WHO\)](#) acknowledges self-care as "the ability of individuals, families and communities to promote health, prevent disease, maintain health, and to cope with illness and disability with or without the support of a healthcare provider." <sup>3</sup>

At MIPS, we believe that caring for self is not something that 'just happens,' but a condition that individuals must prepare for, cultivate, and commit to. By embracing self-care as a way of improving and increasing your intellectual, physical, and emotional resources, skills, and abilities you are better prepared to meet life's challenges while sustaining a sense of balance, connectedness, adequate functioning, and optimism.

## Lifelong learning as self-care

Committing to lifelong learning and continuous development, both professional and personal, can be a form of self-care. At the heart of furthering your learning is the preservation and enhancement of your single most important asset: You!

According to Stephen Covey, worldwide leader in leadership and personal effectiveness, this means regularly renewing and strengthening the four key dimensions of your life: your mind, your body, your heart, and your spirit<sup>4</sup>.

The key is to design your lifelong learning journey in a way that brings the greatest benefits not only to your patients, but also to yourself.

# Continuous learning is an investment in your future

- **Improves your adaptability.** Ongoing learning and critical reflection help you to cope and adapt to situations you cannot yet foresee.
- **Develops your life skills.** Communicating clearly and unambiguously, being self-aware, thinking and reflecting critically, as well as leading others are all leadership skills that can be learned and mastered with the right training and support.
- **Good for your health.** The relationship between longevity and education is well researched. Reading, even for short periods of time, can reduce your stress levels and helps you live longer<sup>5</sup>. While book reading provides a survival advantage among the elderly<sup>6</sup>, learning difficult skills in older age is associated with improved memory and cognition<sup>7</sup>.

## Make time – striking the elusive balance

In his editorial note *Can Covey's 7 habits produce a highly effective plastic surgeon?*<sup>8</sup> Dr Andrew Diver recommends practitioners to try to find their “why?”, to have a clear idea of their ultimate destination. He argues that by implementing effective daily habits, practitioners can achieve personal and professional effectiveness, and pave their way towards a fulfilling career in healthcare such as:

1. **Beginning with the end in mind.** Start each day, task, or project with a sharp vision of your ultimate, long-term direction and destination. Ask yourself - what are you trying to achieve for the day or through a particular task? What outcomes do you want to see materialised? By having your end goals at the forefront of your thinking, you are more likely to prioritise effectively, and move your aspirations into the real world.
2. **First things first.** Based on Covey's Time Management Matrix<sup>9</sup>, this four-quadrant exercise requires classification of each of your responsibilities as 'Important' or 'Non-important' and 'Urgent' or 'Non-urgent.' This evaluation guides the construction of the table below. Although, at first, all tasks may appear to be equally important, this exercise requires prioritisation by their relative importance for achieving your ultimate career goals<sup>10</sup>:

<p><b>Quadrant 1: Urgent &amp; important</b></p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Page concerning patient with chest pain</li> <li>• Grant submission due in 48h</li> <li>• National meeting presentation due in three days</li> <li>• Upcoming annual meeting with chief to review goals and responsibilities</li> </ul>	<p><b>Quadrant 3: Non important &amp; urgent</b></p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Routine patient phone calls</li> <li>• Immediate patient billing</li> <li>• Routine medication refills</li> <li>• Complete trainee evaluation forms</li> <li>• Interview medical school candidates</li> </ul>
<p><b>Quadrant 2: Non urgent and important</b></p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Grant submission due in 3–6 months</li> <li>• New innovative educational curriculum</li> <li>• Write review article</li> <li>• Document patient encounters in EMR</li> <li>• Committee chairperson to prepare agenda for upcoming meeting</li> <li>• Planning new clinical quality improvement initiative</li> <li>• Review long-term career goals</li> </ul>	<p><b>Quadrant 4: Non important &amp; non urgent</b></p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Non-urgent email</li> <li>• Non-urgent paperwork</li> <li>• Excessive social media &amp; TV</li> <li>• Procrastination activities</li> </ul>

Table adapted from Gordon & Borgan (2014)<sup>9</sup>

3. **Perform an annual self-inventory.** "Where am I going?" "How am I getting on?" "Where to next?" Just like we all need regular health checks, having annual 'life design' check-ups to assess how our work matches up with our competencies, skills and goals can be greatly beneficial. By reflecting on your own plans and development, you can make better choices when it comes to deciding what type of future work you want to do, as well as what you will need to learn to help you get there. In this context, setting up a 'skills portfolio,' which you can review on an ongoing basis, edit, and refine can be an extremely useful tool.

## Lifelong learning at MIPS

MIPS is committed to supporting our members' learning journey through risk education programs. Monthly CPD-accredited (Continuing Professional Development) webinars, articles and case studies will support members in meeting their AHPRA

registration requirements for CPD education.

As a key benefit to MIPS membership, MIPS' risk education focuses on delivering clinico-legal awareness training and providing strategies to minimise the likelihood of a claim, complaint, or investigation from AHPRA, the Boards, any of the health complaint commissions or patients and their families.

A complete suite of our education resources can be found at [mips.com.au](https://mips.com.au)

Our February and March 2022 events are now available in [Upcoming Events](#), please feel free to register and begin planning for the new year.

## Further resources

<sup>1</sup> [Roy Morgan Image of Professions Survey 2021](#)

<sup>2</sup> Dobson, H., Malpas, C. B., Burrell, A. J., Gurvich, C., Chen, L., Kulkarni, J., & Winton-Brown, T. (2021). Burnout and psychological distress amongst Australian healthcare workers during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Australasian Psychiatry*, 29(1), 26-30.

<sup>3</sup> [What do we mean by self-care?](#)

<sup>4</sup> Covey, S. R. (2015). *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People: Snapshots Edition*. Mango Media Inc..

<sup>5</sup> Bavishi, A., Slade, M. D., & Levy, B. R. (2016). A chapter a day: Association of book reading with longevity. *Social Science & Medicine*, 164, 44-48.

<sup>6</sup> *ibid*

<sup>7</sup> Park, D. C., Lodi-Smith, J., Drew, L., Haber, S., Hebrank, A., Bischof, G. N., & Aamodt, W. (2014). The impact of sustained engagement on cognitive function in older adults: The Synapse Project. *Psychological science*, 25(1), 103-112.

<sup>8</sup> Diver A. J. (2018). Can Covey's 7 Habits Produce a Highly Effective Plastic Surgeon?. *Annals of plastic surgery*, 80(6), 593-594

<sup>9</sup> Gordon CE, Borkan SC (2014). Recapturing time: a practical approach to time management for physicians. *Postgrad Med J* 90:267-272.

<sup>10</sup> *ibid*

This information is not intended to be legal advice and as such should not be relied on as a substitute. You may need to consider seeking legal or other professional advice about your individual circumstances as appropriate. Should you wish to obtain further information you can review our [Member Handbook Combined PDS and FSG](#) or contact MIPS on 1800 061 113. You may need to consider seeking legal or other professional advice about your individual circumstances as appropriate. Information is current as at the date published.

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