

The system of Continuing Medical Education (CME) aims to ensure that physicians and other health-care practitioners maintain a high level of theoretical and clinical competence throughout their professional careers. A wide variety of educational activities can be approved for CME, allowing health-care professionals to maintain, develop and increase their medical knowledge and skill and to improve their professional performance to ensure better and safer treatment for patients.

Physicians are faced with an ever-increasing amount of medical communication and education initiatives. Items or activities that have been CME approved provide added value, since they are correctly viewed as meeting educational needs, being of independent scientific importance, and helping the recipients/attendees meet their CME requirements.

CME approval may be the deciding factor in whether a physician attends a sponsored satellite symposium, reads a monograph, or uses a slide kit.

## 1 What is CME?

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In order to keep their medical practice licenses, physicians must accrue a certain amount of CME credits over a set period of time in order to show their licensing bodies that their clinical knowledge has, effectively, been kept up-to-date with progress in medical treatments and technology.

In the US, CME requirements vary between states but generally require a physician to spend 25–50 hours a year undertaking CME-approved activities.

In European countries with CME systems, the requirements are set nationally, but are of the same order. Some countries in Europe mandate a legal obligation to collect a certain number of credits in order to practice medicine, while in other countries no such system exists and CME is considered to be an ethical and moral responsibility laid on individual practitioners. CME is required in the UK and Germany for revalidation of medical practice licenses, and it is also mandatory in Italy, Spain, and France.

The requirements for CME are expressed in terms of credits, where one learning credit is gained by undertaking one hour of an approved kind of educational activity. Activities that can be approved for CME include symposia, seminars, self-study materials (eg, monographs, slide sets, webcasts), and self-assessment programs. Items in audio-visual or computer-based formats can qualify for CME approval, as well as printed materials. The development of internet-based systems of online recording and distribution has opened the way to more flexible methods of delivering CME activities to physicians. CME can also be required for nurses, pharmacists, and other health-care professionals to maintain their legal right to practice.

The term Continuing Professional Development (CPD) may also be used, especially in Europe. This emphasizes the broader professional roles that physicians and other health-care workers perform.

## 2 Getting your activity CME-approved

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Only an accredited institution or organization can designate an activity as qualifying for CME. In the US, the Accreditation Council for Continuing Medical Education (ACCME) is responsible for CME accreditation of medical schools, state medical societies, and other institutions and organizations that provide CME activities for a national or regional audience. State medical societies accredit institutions and organizations that provide CME activities primarily for physicians within the state or in bordering states. In those European countries with established CME systems at national and/or regional levels, medical societies and associations are the main providers.

Accredited CME providers have detailed requirements that must be fulfilled to ensure and maintain the quality of the CME system, and prevent abuses of that system. In general, all CME providers require the following when considering an activity for approval:

- Early involvement in planning
- Evidence of an educational need
- Proof that non-biased education will be provided
- Procedures for recording attendance/receipt and collating evaluative feedback
- Mechanisms for assessing the learning points provided
- CME credit and accreditation information on all promotional literature.

In addition, all documentation regarding the activity must be retained, including letters, faxes, hand-written notes, e-mails, transcripts or minutes of telephone conversations, etc, relating to the planning of the activity, the selection of faculty, and the development of the activity content. Individual CME accreditors have different requirements for what needs to be kept on file. A general rule is to keep everything, no matter how trivial it seems at the time.

## 3 International opportunities

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In the United States, the CME system was established over 40 years ago by the American Medical Association (AMA), and the concept of CME is highly integrated into the organization and practice of the American medical community. At present there is no standardized European system for accrediting CME activities and providing credits.

However, opportunities for gaining internationally recognized CME approval are increasing. In Europe, the Union of European Medical Specialists (UEMS) set up the European Accreditation Council for CME (EACCME) in 1999, to develop a common European CME system. Since 2000, this committee has acted as an overall umbrella organization for the national CME authorities, and it guarantees the reciprocity of awarded CME credits in different European countries. The system is becoming more widely accepted in Europe, with the European Boards and many other European professional institutions, such as the Federation of European Cancer Societies and

the European Federation of Neurological Sciences, working with the EACCME on their CME activities.

The UEMS has also signed a joint agreement with the AMA to establish a reciprocal system for recognizing credits awarded by American and European CME providers. Under this agreement, currently extended to 2006, the AMA Council on Medical Education recognizes EACCME credits awarded for live events.

#### **4 New: European Union of Medical Specialists Accreditation of e-Learning**

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From April 6, 2009, the European Union of Medical Specialists (UEMS) will accredit e-learning for doctors in all countries and specialities throughout Europe that have a recognition agreement with the European Accreditation Council for Continuing Medical Education (EACCME). This covers all non-printed materials including content delivered by recorded audio, recorded video, CD-ROM, DVD, and PDA. The decision of the UEMS to accredit e-learning is important in that it reflects the fact that 94% of doctors would prefer e-CME to live events – but until now only 30% of CME activities has included an e-learning component<sup>1</sup>.

*Facilitate* has thoroughly researched the UEMS accreditation process and application criteria for physician e-learning and we are delighted to add this service to our portfolio.

1. Physician Insight Survey (US, EU, Japan) Datamonitor

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