

# ***Health Policy Newsletter***

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## CME Update

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## CME Update

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This month we focus on some of the major players in the world of CME, specifically the two largest organizations involved in physician's continuing medical education. Certification of activities for Category 1 credit involves two different national organizations with collaborative rules: The **Accreditation Council for Continuing Medical Education and the American Medical Association**.

**The Accreditation Council for Continuing Medical Education (ACCME)** manages the "accreditation" system for the United States. It approves organizations to sponsor continuing medical education for physicians. All organizations wishing to be approved must meet a set of national standards, known as the Essential Areas and Standards and must go through periodic review and reapproval to retain their status as organizations accredited to sponsor CME for physicians. A goal of accreditation is to maintain certain quality standards, with the accrediting organization (The ACCME in this case) encouraging self-improvement in achieving and/or maintaining these quality standards.<sup>1</sup>

**The American Medical Association (AMA)** sets the criteria that organizations accredited by the ACCME must follow in order to certify that an activity meets the Essential Areas and Standards. It determines the types of activities an accredited organization can certify for Category 1 or Category 2 credit, and what physicians may self-report and claim for Category 1 or 2 credit from informal educational activities. While the AMA issues a "Physician Recognition Award" (PRA) which encourages all physicians to participate in a balanced, personal education program, many states and health care organizations require physicians to participate in certified Category 1 activities to retain hospital/insurance credentialing and state and/or specialty society membership. Some states require ongoing, documented participation in Category 1 credit activities in order to maintain licensure<sup>2</sup>.

The AMA PRA Information Booklet<sup>2</sup> identifies six specific types of activities that may be designated by an ACCME-accredited sponsor for Category 1 credit:

- Formal learning activities sponsored by accredited sponsors
- CME activities in journals
- CME enduring materials (monographs, CD ROM, audio tapes, etc.)
- International conferences approved by the AMA
- Passing a recertification exam
- Participating in an ACCME accredited program (as residents)
- Study leading to a medically related degree (an MPH for example)

The AMA recently announced three new areas for which a limited number of Category 1 credit hours may be claimed by physicians without formal designation of credit by an ACCME accredited sponsor for those applying for a PRA from the AMA.<sup>3</sup>

These are of particular interest to those physicians who publish and teach as they include:

- Preparation of articles published in peer-reviewed journals (defined as journals included in Index Medicus) for one article per year, up to 10 Category 1 credits.
- Poster preparation for an exhibit at a medical meeting designated for AMA PRA Category 1 credit, with a published abstract, for one poster presentation/year up to five Category 1 credits.
- Teaching in activities designated for AMA category 1 or 2, for up to 10 credits per year with 2 Category 1 credits for each of hour of lecture.

Along with these significant changes, the AMA is reemphasizing that physicians should choose their CME activities guided by the measure that the CME activity "contain information on subjects *relevant* to the physician's needs"<sup>3</sup>.

### **Who does what?**

There is frequently confusion as to how an individual activity ultimately receives the desired Category 1 credit status. The actual designation of credit is done by an organization (such as a medical school or hospital) formally recognized by the ACCME as a sponsor of CME for physicians. This organization "certifies" that the activity meets BOTH all the ACCME Essentials AND all the AMA requirements.

This ability to 'certify' activities is effectively 'delegated' to accredited sponsors by the ACCME and AMA. Both the ACCME and the AMA monitor the work of accredited organizations via different vehicles. The ACCME holds primary responsibility for this monitoring, accomplished through:

- annual reports on aggregate data by all accredited sponsors,
- reaccreditation reviews [reporting on all certified activities given by an accredited sponsor] including site surveys,
- inquiry from the ACCME's "External Monitoring Committee" which investigates complaints and inquiries referred to it.

As you can see, the accountability of accredited sponsors to the ACCME has increased over the past few years. This is consistent with changes in the overall health care environment and the renewed emphasis on outcomes and continuous improvement.

### **References**

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