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## Jefferson Medical College and CME: New Challenges, New Opportunities

**Richard C. Wender, MD\***  
**Geno J. Merli, MD\***

\* Thomas Jefferson University

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## Jefferson Medical College and CME: New Challenges, New Opportunities

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Emerging economic, regulatory, ethical, and technologic factors are creating both challenges and opportunities for the field of Continuing Medical Education. Recognizing the imperative for change, Continuing Medical Education (CME) at Jefferson Medical College has formulated a new vision to ensure that CME at Jefferson addresses lifelong learning needs for physicians and is consistent with realization of the JMC strategic plan.

Evidence demonstrates that physicians are accessing CME in new ways. Although attendance at conferences or meetings continues to be the predominate mechanism to acquire CME credits, busy clinicians increasingly utilize alternative delivery modes such as CD-ROM's, audiotapes, journal-based CME, and on-line learning.<sup>1,2</sup> In fact, a great deal of learning is occurring in the course of routine patient care through database and web-based searches to answer specific clinical questions. Figuring out how to "recognize" and provide credit for this type of learning poses challenges but also creates an opportunity to impact clinician behavior.

Every institution currently providing support for CME, whether that support comes from an industry partner, a foundation or granting agency, or directly from a health center, faces an accountability imperative. For a CME program to meet the needs of supporting partners, it must demonstrate actual benefit. Increasingly, CME programs will need to define expected outcomes and identify mechanisms to measure the achievement of outcomes. In fact, although definitive research is lacking, evidence suggests that traditional CME has relatively little impact on physician behavior and that the change in behavior that does result from CME is often not sustained.<sup>3</sup> Improving the health of the country demands changes in how clinicians deliver care. In order for CME to be a viable part of a quality improvement program, measurable sustainable changes in clinician behavior must be achieved.

Research in quality improvement convincingly demonstrates that interdisciplinary efforts are required to improve health care quality. Most of the sustainable changes in care delivery result from system change, and system change demands planning, implementation and monitoring.<sup>4,5</sup> Although health professions have traditionally organized continuing education within the scope of their own professions, the successful programs of the future will almost certainly demand interdisciplinary planning and execution.<sup>6</sup>

In response to demands for financial accountability and heightened ethical standards, the pharmaceutical industry is undergoing reevaluation of its traditional methods of contacting and influencing physicians. New guidelines have been published (by the industry group, PhRMA) and most companies intend to voluntarily comply with them.<sup>7</sup> In these new guidelines, mixing entertainment with "education" will no longer occur. CME presents a promising opportunity for collaboration between pharmaceutical companies and academic health centers.

### **The Future of CME at Jefferson:**

In order to address these emerging trends, the CME committee of JMC formed two task forces to provide guidance in a planning and quality improvement process. The

first task force consists of representatives from each of the clinical departments in the College. In a half-day meeting attended by Dean Thomas Nasca, Dr. Clara Callahan, the Vice Dean for Academic Programs, and Dr. Geno Merli, the Senior Associate Dean for CME, a new vision of CME at Jefferson began to take shape. The initial steps to realizing that vision are now ongoing. The key elements of that vision are:

- CME at Jefferson will be recognized as a national leader in the field of education for practicing clinicians.
- Jefferson's CME program must be self-sustaining and, preferably, revenue generating.
- Jefferson's CME programs must have a common or "branded" look to promote rapid and sustained recognition.
- Jefferson CME must have a marketing strategy that addresses customers' needs and plans programs that address those needs.
- Jefferson CME must establish mechanisms to routinely measure the impact of its programs, including the capacity to assess physician behavior change.
- Jefferson CME must deliver programs through a variety of media mechanisms. Strategies to accredit learning activities that reflect how today's physicians actually attain new knowledge must be developed.
- Jefferson CME must develop interdisciplinary programs and accredited activities that encourage development of the types of systems that have been proven to improve care delivery.

The second CME Committee task force is the Industry Advisory Council. This group consists of representatives from most of the major pharmaceutical companies with which Jefferson currently has or conceivably could develop a CME partnership. This Advisory Council served to reiterate the messages that emerged at the CME task force meeting. Jefferson CME must have high ethical standards to ensure credibility for all of its sponsored activities. Jefferson must be at the forefront in developing ways to measure program effectiveness, including changes in physician behavior.

### **Next Steps:**

The next steps in making this vision a reality are to communicate the vision to the entire University community and its partners. This article forms a part of this communication strategy. Discussions are already underway to promote interdisciplinary collaboration with all three Colleges in the University. The CME Committee is working with several departments to develop a systematic approach to assessment measures for CME programs. Efforts to develop a CME "brand" have also been started.

CME at Jefferson can play a critical role in achievement of the strategic goals of the College and the University. CME is a vehicle to promote excellence in clinical care and education and to provide true educational value through the lifetime of our clinicians. CME is committed to building on its well-established strengths to become a

leader in providing state-of-the-art education to clinicians that promotes implementation of quality standards with the ultimate goal of improving the health of the public.

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## About the Authors

Richard C. Wender, MD, is a Clinical Professor, Chair of the Department of Family Medicine, and Chair of the Committee on CME at Thomas Jefferson University. Geno J. Merli, MD, is the Ludwig Kind Professor of Medicine and Senior Associate Dean for Continuing Medical Education at Thomas Jefferson University. Please address comments and questions to [richard.wender@mail.tju.edu](mailto:richard.wender@mail.tju.edu), or [geno.merli@mail.tju.edu](mailto:geno.merli@mail.tju.edu).