

Understanding the “Me” in “CME”

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A Meetings & Expositions Section Council member explains why all associations involved in education accreditation should be paying attention to the issues surrounding continuing medical education or CME. He also provides a preview of special sessions at the M&E Days at ASAE & The Center's Annual Meeting & Exposition in Chicago.

OIG, HHS, FDA... government agencies responsible for monitoring self-regulation of healthcare-related issues.

PhRMA, AdvaMed, NEMA... associations who have taken steps to initiate guidelines for member compliance with regard to promotion of products and services to Doctors of Medicine (MDs).

These acronyms have gained increasing attention over the past decade and raised the awareness of organizations that provide educational activities as accredited and approved by the Accreditation Council on Continuing Medical Education (ACCME)—another notable acronym and an organization now caught in the crosshairs of a growing debate surrounding *continuing medical education* (CME) and the propriety with which companies may legally and ethically solicit the interest and business of MDs.

Over the years a natural waxing and waning of interest on the part of federal and state governments has taken place over issues of corporate dealings with MDs. Until recently, the focus has been primarily on associations whose memberships are directly involved in this practice. As such, the Doctors of Optometry, a non-MD healthcare profession for which I work, and I have paid little attention to the tides of legislation and self-regulation that have resulted from these discussions across the country. That is, until I realized there was a “Me,” albeit implicit, within CME.

A few years ago I asked myself, “How could policies relating to educational activities for a wholly different profession impact my daily tasks?” I soon realized what a loaded question that was indeed, and I now long for the simpler days when ignorance on this matter was filled with bliss. Answers to my narrow-sighted question continue to define the “Me” in CME on what seems almost a daily basis.

CME scrutiny could impact other education-accrediting organizations

The first evidence that CME was indirectly influencing the work of organizations that execute similar but unrelated education, such as continuing education (CE), continuing education credits (CECs), continuing education units (CEUs), continuing professional development (CPD), and so forth, came in the form of changing behaviors among companies funding these distinctly accredited educational programs as well as CME.

With heightened scrutiny of CME funding, a spillover effect placed many healthcare-related education organizations and the companies that fund them on alert. As a result, more deliberate planning and calculated action have since permeated educational support decision-making and corporate recognition efforts by both.

With the December 2006 U.S. Senate Committee on Finance [request](#) for ACCME to further define its role in standard-setting for the separation and independence of commercial support and CME activities, all education-accrediting entities, healthcare or otherwise, should take notice and begin self-evaluation of the impact their corporate funding could have on education activities.

At this time, support from any number of education grantors could be affected. Numerous products that at first glance appear to be nonmedical in purpose actually relate to healthcare. For instance, not only could drug companies be affected by the changing atmosphere but also sunglass and battery manufacturers.

M&E Days sessions to address healthcare education issues

Given the shift in governmental focus from primarily for-profit sales and advertising methodology to nonprofit development and accreditation of unbiased education, the educational series on this topic at ASAE & The Center's Annual Meeting & Exposition, *Connecting07*, will prove valuable and timely.

Please take a few minutes to explore the topics that will be covered in four special sessions co-hosted by the Meetings & Exposition Section Council and Healthcare Community Steering Committee during M&E Days:

- Quantifying Our Tangible Value in Grants;
- Update on CME Issues;
- The Best of Times, The Worst of Times—Pearls and Pitfalls from Your Peers;
- Managing the Grant Process.

These sessions have been designed to illustrate the need for healthcare association and meeting professionals to clearly define the role that industry plays in the implementation of education. They also will encourage association and meeting professionals operating outside the perceived scope of healthcare-related fields to take the time to identify ways in which governmental review of corporate support could potentially affect not only the "Me" in CME but also the "You" in CEU.

Clark Thomas, MPA, CAE, is serving his first year on ASAE & The Center's Meetings & Expositions Section Council and will co-present on a CME topic at Connecting07. He is a member of the section council's public relations subcommittee and the senior director of operations and development for The Southern Council of Optometrists, Inc./SECO International, LLC in Atlanta, Georgia