

Updates Relating to Commercial Bias in Continuing Medical Education Programs

Rules governing the commercial support for continuing medical education (CME) and disclosure of conflicts of interest are becoming stricter. The Accreditation Council for Continuing Medical Education (ACCME) has issued "Updated Standards for Commercial Support of Continuing Medical Education" requiring all persons who are in a position to control the content of an educational activity to disclose all relevant financial relationships within the previous 12 months. The new standards also require providers of CME to implement a mechanism to identify and resolve all conflicts of interest prior to the educational activity.

The Spokane County Medical Society (SCMS) takes several measures to reduce commercial bias at their continuing medical education programs.

SCMS must ensure that the following decisions were made free of the control of a commercial interest. The SCMS defines a "commercial interest" as any proprietary entity producing health care goods or services, with the exemption of non-profit or government organizations and non-health care related companies.

- Identification of CME needs
- Determination of educational objectives
- Selection and presentation of content
- Selection of all persons and organizations that will be in a position to control the content of the CME
- Selection of educational methods
- Evaluation of the activity

SCMS must also be able to show that everyone who is in a position to control the content of an educational activity has disclosed all relevant financial relationships with any commercial interest to the provider. The SCMS defines "relevant" financial relationships" as financial relationships in any amount occurring within the past 12 months that create a conflict of interest.

In addition the content or format of a CME activity or its related materials must promote improvements or quality in healthcare and not a specific proprietary business interest or a commercial interest.

Presentations must give a balanced view of therapeutic options. Use of generic names contributes to this impartiality. If the CME educational material or content includes trade names, where available trade names from several companies should be used, not just trade names from a single company. The source of all support from commercial interests must be disclosed to learners. When commercial support is 'in-kind,' the nature of the support must be disclosed to learners. Presentations must give a balanced view of therapeutic options.

The Spokane County Medical Society CME Department continues to update policies and procedures to ensure quality Category I CME programs.