

## DRAMATIC CHANGES TO CME ACCREDITATION PROCESS COMPEL SCRUTINY AND COMMENT

by  
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To ensure that doctors keep up with the latest medical advances, every State requires the doctors it licenses to attend a minimum number of accredited continuing medical education (CME) courses each year. The accreditation process, designed to ensure that CME courses are both up-to-date and unbiased, is handled by a private organization known as the Accreditation Council for Continuing Medical Education (ACCME). An ACCME task force recently proposed a radical re-writing of its accreditation standards that could result both in a significant lowering of the quality of CME and in the suppression of valuable medical information.

The ACCME has long been concerned that a CME presenter may be biased in favor of one drug company's products if she is being compensated by that company. To guard against bias, current accreditation standards require CME providers to disclose any commercial support they received in connection with a CME event, and to require speakers to disclose any significant financial relationship they have with the manufacturer of a drug to be discussed. The Food and Drug Administration has been generally satisfied with those standards and in recent years has not sought to sanction manufacturers based on their support of any CME that is accredited by the ACCME.

The ACCME task force has concluded that full disclosure is no longer sufficient; it seeks to alter CME standards to require disqualification of speakers who have any significant financial relationship with the manufacturer of a drug to be discussed. The task force provides no explanation regarding the necessity for this major change, which appears to cut against the normal First Amendment presumption that requiring additional speech (in the form of full disclosure) is preferable to blanket suppression of speech not shown to be false or inherently misleading. The proposed standards revision also runs up against a significant practical problem: most of the top medical authorities in this country, and virtually all of the top speakers on medical topics, are employed in some capacity by one or more of the leading pharmaceutical companies. Excluding these top medical professionals from CME may well lead to a decline in the quality of CME presentations. Indeed, the only individuals likely to be knowledgeable regarding the latest compounds in development are precisely those medical professionals working with the company that is financing the development.

Copies of the proposal (entitled, "New ACCME Standards for Commercial Support"), as well as the form for submitting comments, are available on the ACCME web site at [www.accme.org](http://www.accme.org). Comments are due on or before **March 15, 2003**. All submissions should be submitted by email to [SCS@accme.org](mailto:SCS@accme.org).

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