

Continuing Medical Education

Medicine changes rapidly with new scientific information and technology. To keep up with these changes, doctors learn all through their professional lives. Studying and educational experiences do not end for doctors after medical school and residency training. This lifelong learning is called **continuing medical education (CME)**.

In order to examine patients, prescribe treatments, or perform medical procedures or surgery, all medical doctors must have a current license to practice medicine. Because CME is so important, almost all of the states in the United States include CME as a requirement for renewal of a doctor's medical license. Participation in CME may involve a variety of educational experiences to keep doctors up to date in their area of medicine.

Because research may change how doctors practice, it is important for doctors to learn about research results through CME. **Evidence-based medicine** is medical practice that is guided by the results of research studies. New ways to take care of patients, especially those with chronic diseases like diabetes, asthma, or heart disease, are developed from large research studies. Doctors and patients alike benefit from learning about evidence-based medicine guidelines. This is best done through CME activities that focus on what each doctor needs to learn to take better care of his or her patients.

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TYPES OF CME

Doctors find CME activities in several different ways: meetings, lectures, classes, workshops, video, audio, and computer learning. Doctors can also participate in CME activities based on reading scientific journals (like JAMA) or books. Studies show that interactive learning (where the student gets immediate feedback on his or her progress) may be particularly helpful in teaching new concepts and ideas. Newer techniques using computers, including online courses, may improve learning because they can be used at any time, can provide feedback right away, and can be geared for each doctor's own interests and needs. Medical meetings are also important sources of CME for doctors because they provide a way for doctors to be presented with new information and research and allow this new information and research to be discussed and criticized.

DOCTOR AND PATIENT LEARNING

Patients can ask their doctors about new health information. Web sites associated with medical societies and government health agencies have CME and health information for both patients and doctors to use. Doctors may ask about the health information that patients bring to the office visit or to the hospital. Sharing this information may help both the patient (to understand the health information better) and the doctor (to understand what kinds of medical information can benefit patients).

Sources: American Medical Association, Accreditation Council on Continuing Medical Education

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FOR MORE INFORMATION

- Accreditation Council on Continuing Medical Education
www.accme.org
- American Medical Association (Medical Education) CME
www.ama-assn.org
- Alliance for CME: The International Association of CME Professionals
www.acme-assn.org
- National Library of Medicine
www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus

INFORM YOURSELF

To find this and previous JAMA Patient Pages, go to the Patient Page link on JAMA's Web site at www.jama.com. They are available in English and Spanish. A Patient Page on medical education was published in the September 6, 2000, issue and one on evidence-based medicine in the September 6, 2006, issue.

