HEART OF THE MATTER

Getting CME Back on Track

There was a time in the distant past—well, slightly less than a half a century ago—when academic physicians and medical schools took responsibility for the postgraduate education of their trainees and their community doctors. Faculty members were actually sent out to give talks and clinics—without pay. One of the benefits of this process was the communication between the medical center and its community of physicians. Although information was shared, the most important aspect of this interaction was providing a name and a face and a telephone number, so physicians could find help to solve the problems of their patients.

Along the way, something knocked this continuing medical education train off the rails: the pharmaceutical industry. Medical schools and teaching hospitals were quick to pass the responsibilities on to pharma in an atmosphere where the profit motives of both were intertwined. Since then, medical educators have been trying to get that train back on track after realizing the dubious nature of the relationship between industry and CME.

The pharmaceutical industry, under intense pressure from Congress, is pulling back its support for CME. Medical educators are trying to develop a new framework for the support of practicing physicians, in an increasingly complex environment where instant education is critically needed. In some instances, industry is establishing open-ended grants to medical schools, such as the recent offer by Pfizer University, Detroit.

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