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Recommended Citation

Vakani, F., Wasim Jafri, S., Amin, A., Sheerani, M. (2011). Criteria for awarding CME credits to health physicians. *Journal of the College of Physicians and Surgeons Pakistan*, 21(10), 647-8.

Available at: http://ecommons.aku.edu/pakistan_fhs_mc_cpe/4

Criteria for Awarding CME Credits to Health Physicians

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Credits have traditionally served as an incentive for physicians to participate in the continuing medical education (CME), which is the means for life-long learning. The public at large has granted special rights to the profession of medicine giving them their most precious commodity; their lives. The providers of CME have a responsibility to maintain and update physicians' knowledge and competency.¹ United States and Canada have been using continuing medical education credit to measure physician's participation in education for more than 50 years. It has been proven that engaging in lifelong learning would lead to a change in physician's practice and improved patient care and outcomes.² In this perspective, we have specifically defined the criteria for awarding CME credits to encourage practicing physicians in Pakistan and particularly within our University setting; as no system has yet been developed to measure and certify physician's participation in educational events. However, this could be replicated to award credits to other continuing professional development (CPD) activities.

American Medical Association Physician's Recognition Award (AMA PRA), was emerged in 1968, in which live educational activities i.e. Category I was designated by accredited providers, whereas the rest five categories included various types of self-directed activities. In 1985, the AMA (PRA) was defined into categories 1 and 2 that made physicians fixed to attain 150 credit hours every 3 years with a minimum of 60 credit hours participation in Category I, i.e. live CME activities. The AMA and the Accreditation Council for Continuing Medical Education (ACCME) describes CME as 'educational activities that serve to maintain, develop, or enhance the knowledge, skills, and professional performance and relationships that a physician uses to provide services for patients, the public or the profession'.³

Ever since its beginning, credit for CME has been calculated by units of time and awarded in hourly increments, as traditionally CME is mainly lecture-based and could most easily be measured in hours. CME

activities in and outside US are still based on one credit per 60 minutes academic activity and are a source to career advancement and salary differentials in some cases.⁴

Credit Awarding Criteria for Health Physicians at the Aga Khan University: The Aga Khan University department of continuing professional education (DCPE) has developed criteria for awarding CME credits to physicians within the university and outside in compliance with the AMA PRA guidelines.³ The defined statues were adopted and implemented, as per our context, to encourage practicing physicians to learn and keep up-to-date and also to introduce and build up the standards of continuing medical education in Pakistan.⁵

1. Awarding Category I Credit: Live CME activities offered solely by the department of continuing professional education or in collaboration with any other department within the university setting are awarded Category I credit(s). There is variety of formats ranging from national conferences and live internet teleconferences to local workshops, seminars, grand rounds, journal clubs or departmental scientific meetings. Sixty minutes of formal interaction between faculty and the physician audience in a live CME activity equals to one credit. The department of continuing professional education aids its regulatory role in awarding CME credits to physicians. If an activity does not follow the definition of CME then it is to be declined from the accreditation process. DCPE ensures that every CME must conform its needs-assessment, objectives and the target audience. Content of the presentation and a brief resume of the presenter are shared by the hosting department to guarantee non-promotional, independent and commercially unbiased learning.

Awarding Credit to Facilitators: Facilitators involved in teaching at any kind of live CME events are awarded credits in recognition of their active contribution. They are awarded double credits for each hour they present. This credit acknowledges the learning associated with the preparation for an original presentation.

2. Awarding Credit to Category II activities: Self-directed educational activities which a physician finds to be worthwhile to improve practice as: teaching residents, medical students or other health professionals; unstructured online searching and learning; reading authoritative medical literature; small group discussions; medical writing; research; consultation with peers and

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Received August 07, 2010; accepted September 06, 2011.

medical experts, etc. are all labeled as Category II. As with live activities, one 'Category II' credit is awarded for each 60 minutes engagement in the learning activity.

The Aga Khan University, Department of Continuing Professional Education maintains full responsibility for recording and issuing the credits for physicians. The certificates for credits are issued at the end of the event once the department ensures and confirms the participant's presence through marked attendance and also on submission of feedback forms for the activity. The quality of the CME events are checked and regulated at the proposal stage when defining and justifying the needs for the CME, group of learners targeted and for any sort of personal or financial conflict of interest or relationship. The credits gained by the physicians within the university setting helps them at the time of their appraisals for promotions and for increments in their salaries. These are also used by the physicians in revalidating their international practicing licenses.

Nevertheless, we hope to see the time when continuing medical education credits will be initiated, awarded, regulated and given importance at the national level and the licensing body, Pakistan Medical and Dental Council (PMDC) demands a certain amount of Continuing

Medical Education hours to be enforced before a physician is relicensed to practice medicine.

As we understand this, thinking process has already been initiated at the level of PMDC, College of Physicians and Surgeons Pakistan and Armed Forces.

We anticipate that once these processes are in place on a National level, it will no longer be possible for any physician to get a license renewal unless he acquires sufficient credits through Continuing Medical Education for that year.

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