

Guidelines for CME Activities Accredited by the EBVS

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Key Words: Guidelines; CME; Accredited; EBVS; UEMS.

Continuing Medical Education (CME) can be defined 'educational activities that serve to maintain, develop, or increase the knowledge, skills and professional performance (and) relationships used by a physician to provide services for patients, the public, or the profession'.¹ It is a professional responsibility for all practicing physicians and it has become increasingly important in a fast moving medical world.

Many CME activities are organized on a national level. For CME organized on a European level, the European Board of Vascular Surgery of the UEMS (Union Européenne des Médecins Spécialistes) has accepted a responsibility concerning the quality of these CME activities. It is important to realize that the EBVS is not a provider of Continuing Medical Education (CME) but must be seen as an independent authority that by its activities may assist as a clearinghouse for CME credits from a European to a national level. The EBVS has proposed accreditation for European Vascular CME activities since 1999.² The CME Committee has been very active and accredits many European vascular meetings each year according to simple published criteria. Criteria for CME initially focused on major meetings in order to ensure that our criteria were reliable. CME activities have now been extended to technical skills workshops, again with specific and transparent criteria.

Why are guidelines necessary? Traditionally, the pharmaceutical and medical device manufacturers have generously supported CME for physicians. Without industrial support, the quality of many activities would have been reduced and some activities would have been cancelled. During the last decade

physicians, editorial boards of scientific journals and authorities have increasingly scrutinised the role of industry supporting these activities.^{3–5} The basis for the concern is that scientific activities may be used for promotional activities without clearly identifying these activities. In 1993, Mannick reported on the 'scientific symposium' grafted onto the national meetings. For many of these both the programme and the speakers were picked and sponsored by a company. Under these circumstances an unbiased presentation is difficult to attain.⁶ It is clear that a conflict of interest may easily occur if organizers of CME activities need the support of the industry. In fact, travel funds, honoraria for nominal consultancies, free lunches, elegant dinners accompanied by product demonstrations and guest lectures with favourable views of the sponsors' products all threaten our integrity.⁷ Fortunately, both CME providers and the industry have recognized this issue and both are keen to resolve the problem.

The CME Committee of the European Board of Vascular Surgery has discussed this issue at length and believes that for both CME providers and industry, as well as for the participants of CME activities, it would be helpful to provide clear and objective guidelines describing the relationship between the various parties. These guidelines are meant to stimulate a healthy and clear relationship between organizers of CME activities and the industry. The EBVS of the UEMS approved these Guidelines on 2nd September 2003 in Dublin. The Guidelines are published on the website of the EBVS and will be handed to both CME providers and the industry. For practical purposes the Guidelines have been subdivided into those for providers of CME activities, speakers and faculty and industrial sponsors. The Guidelines will be evaluated regularly and comments are encouraged.

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Introduction

Continuing Medical Education (CME) consists of educational activities that serve to maintain, develop, or increase the knowledge, skills and/or professional performance of a physician. CME is provided by CME providers by means of organizing conferences, workshops, etc. and is an important element of Continuing Physician Professional Development (CPPD). Providers of CME are responsible for the provision of objective, balanced and scientifically rigorous information. CME should not be biased.

The relationship between the provision of educational activities and industrial support is essential and acknowledged with gratitude. Subsidies to underwrite the costs of CME activities can contribute to the improvement of those activities and help to reduce the costs of the activity for the participants. However, financial support should never influence the content and quality of the scientific programme. Therefore, financial support from the industry should come in the form of an educational grant with grateful acknowledgement. The need for financial (industrial) support may generate a conflict of interest for the provider of CME or the faculty. To prevent such a conflict of interest, the European Board of Vascular Surgery has established the following guidelines to assist both parties.

Guidelines

For organizers of CME activities

- Physicians involved in providing CME activities should ensure that the programme is balanced.
- Physicians who serve as presenters, moderators, or other faculty at CME conferences should ensure that research findings and therapeutic recommendations are based upon scientifically accurate, up-to-date information and are presented in a balanced, objective manner.
- All potential conflicts of interest or biases, such as a financial connection to a particular commercial company or product, should be disclosed by faculty members to the audience in the programme and/or at the beginning of a presentation.
- A direct financial relationship between speakers and industry should be discouraged. Speakers and faculty should not accept direct subsidies from industry to pay for the costs of travel, lodging, or

other personal expenses. Costs should be reimbursed by the organizer/provider of the CME activities.

- The scientific programme committee is responsible for moderators, presenters and other faculty and welcome suggestions from those companies that have been generous enough to support the programme. Clearly, the responsibility for the moderators, presenters and other faculty lies with the scientific committee.
- Non-CME activities, i.e. primarily promotional seminars, should be clearly identified as such in the programme.

For speakers and other faculty

- Speakers and other faculty involved in providing CME activities should present a range of scientifically supportable viewpoints related to the topics.
- Speakers and other faculty who present, chair or moderate, at CME conferences should ensure that research findings and therapeutic recommendations are based on scientifically accurate, up-to-date information and are presented in a balanced, objective manner.
- All conflicts of interest should be disclosed by faculty members to the audience in the programme and/or at the beginning of a presentation.
- A direct financial relationship between speakers or other faculty and industry should be discouraged. Speakers and faculty should not accept direct subsidies from industry to pay for the costs of travel, lodging, or other personal expenses. Costs should be reimbursed by the organizer/provider of the CME activities.
- Non-CME activities, i.e. primarily promotional seminars, should be clearly identified as such in the programme.

For industrial sponsors

- Financial support of CME activities is greatly appreciated by the organisers of CME activities and it is gratefully recognized that these activities would not be viable without industrial sponsorship. The support should be provided by educational grants to the organisers of the CME activities.
- A direct financial relationship between speakers or other faculty and industry should be discouraged. Speakers and faculty should not offer direct subsidies from industry to pay for the costs of

travel, lodging, or other personal expenses. Costs should be reimbursed by the organizer/provider of the CME activities.

- The scientific programme committee is responsible for moderators, presenters and other faculty. Suggestions from those companies that have been generous enough to support the programme are welcome. However, the responsibility for the moderators, presenters and other faculty lies with the scientific committee.
- CME symposia supported by a sponsor should be fully acknowledged in the appropriate section of the programme. However, a company name in the title of the symposium unintentionally suggests a promotional relationship. For this reason sponsor names should not be included in the title of the CME symposium.
- Non-CME activities, i.e. primarily promotional seminars, should be clearly identified in the programme.

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Accepted 9 February 2004