

CONTINUING EDUCATION: WHAT WERE THEY THINKING?

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How many audiologists could pass a state licensing exam or national certification test if it were required every few years to stay in practice? It may well be that the length of time between finishing grad school and taking the licensing test would be indirectly related to the number of persons passing the exam. All professional fields move forward with respect to philosophies, protocols, methods, equipment and instruments, as well as even some of the fundamental concepts underlying all of the above. Somewhere in the not-so-distant past, licensing boards, certifying agencies, and professional organizations determined that, in order to assure the integrity of the profession, it would be in the best interest of all, especially the consumer, to require continuing professional education. The American Academy of Audiology is no different. Principle 2 of the *Code of Ethics* states that Academy members will maintain high professional standards. Rule 2g pertaining to this precept requires members to participate in continuing education.

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In concept, continuing education (CE) is terrific. Requiring people to keep abreast of new developments in their area of expertise is good for everyone. The problems arise when specific details of the


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requirements are left undefined. The vagueness in more codified requirements was intentional so as not to limit professionals from evaluating their own limitations and acting to minimize their own shortcomings. In audiology, if one judged him-or-herself to be in need of, say, updating in the area of neonatal techniques, one would pursue that CE avenue to "balance" their professional growth.

The "balance" of professional knowledge, breadth and depth, was the center focus in establishing the CE requirement. Even though there are clinicians who specialize, the intent of CE was to help assure that all members

of the profession maintained a minimal degree of clinical competence as the profession moved forward.

A large portion of the American Academy of Audiology membership is involved in the dispensing of hearing aids. As instrument technology advanced, the need for product-specific training arose. Instrument manufacturers, in an effort to promote use of their products, began offering CE credit for training specific to their hearing aid. A significant number of Academy members obtain the required CE every year with nothing more than product specific training. Many hearing instrument manufacturers report that, if CE is not offered as a part of their programming training, attendance at these sessions is difficult to assure.

The necessity of being able to manipulate hearing aid software is not the point under discussion, but rather, whether this training alone satisfies the intentions of continuing education. And, it is not the educational intentions of the clinician that must be met, but rather the intentions of the licensing, certifying, and/or professional organizations which have set the CE requirements in place, including the American Academy of Audiology and its *Code of Ethics*. 

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