Continuing Professional Development for Radiologists Using the Web as a Delivery Vehicle

Bernice Capusten

THE ROYAL COLLEGE of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada (RC), the Canadian national specialist training body, developed the Maintenance of Certification Program that defines the requirements for postgraduate recertification. Every 5 years, starting January 2000, each Fellow of the Royal College must accumulate 400 credits in the categories listed in Table 1.

Special emphasis (2 credits/hour) is given to self-assessment programs sponsored by national specialty societies. Fellows will have to register credits in electronic format only by the year 2003. Efforts to educate physicians to use electronic communication and educational tools enhance their abilities to succeed at recertification.

Radiologists are accustomed to working with computers. Of 174 members of the Alberta Society of Radiologists, 101 had published E-mail addresses and of these, 55 agreed to participate in the Alberta Pilot Project (APP). The purpose of this study is to prepare educational modules six times a year and distribute them over the web. Each module will consist of approximately 50 questions relating to a particular subject such as *Emergency Radiology*, *Obstetrical Ultrasound*, or *Stroke Diagnosis and Treatment*. Modules are prepared from various sources, including the RC Question Library, needs analyses, data from the Canadian Medical Protective Association, Clinical Practice

Guidelines, and the local licensing authority (College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada). The questions consist of either multiple choice (one correct answer in four choices) or true/false choices.

One of the most challenging steps is finding a way to send medical images. These files are usually very large and take a long time to open. If they are turned into tiff files, they are easier to open and remain diagnostic. It would be simpler to obtain images if they could be captured directly from a picturing archiving and communication system (PACS). In fact, this may be the way this project evolves in the future.

The module is sent as an E-mail message to each participant who chooses a user name and password to access the module. Once completed, the module is submitted to the server for grading. Questions about difficulties with the examination are always included in the modules for ongoing improvement. Individual results are provided along with the correct answers and web sites pertinent to the subject of the module. Personal results are described as a percentile, so one can determine out how he/she performed compared with the others taking the test. Everyone who participates receives documentation of their participation as required by the recertification program.

The results are stored according to user name and password in a relational database.

The Alberta Pilot program has not been running long enough to postulate how successful it will be for continuing professional development. The major problems are funding and personal time required to run the program. Formatting images can be accomplished with a good scanner and software.

Professional development including education can be done easily on the Internet if time is taken to educate the intended audience.

From the University of Calgary, Alberta, Canada.

Address reprint requests to Bernice Capusten, MD, FRCPC, 4730 43A Ave, Red Deer, Alberta, Canada T4N 3G8. E-mail: capusten@telusplanet.net.

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Table 1. The RC Framework of Educational (CPD) Options

Section	Examples of CPD Activities	Assignment of Credits
1: Accredited Group Learning Activities Education sessions produced by accredited providers of CPD activities	Rounds, journal clubs Workshops, courses, conferences Distance education programs	1 credit per hour No maximum
2: Other Learning Activities Learning activities that are not necessarily affiliated with an accredited provider	Nonaccredited rounds & meetings Reading journals and texts Information (MEDLINE) searches Audio/videotapes Computer/Internet CME	1 credit per hour Maximum of 100 credits/5 years
3: Accredited Self-Assessment Program Programs designed to assist the specialist to identify his/her educational needs	Self-assessment programs developed or sponsored by NSS, faculties, and colleges Training or virtual reality simulators used for the purposes of self-assessment	2 credits per hour No maximum
4: Structured Learning Projects Learning activities are planned and the outcome is recorded and evaluated	Personal learning projects generated from participating in a CPD activity in another section Keeping a learning portfolio Traineeships, preceptored courses, Masters & PhD studies	1 credit per hour No maximum
5: Practice Review and Appraisal Activities that assist specialists to review their practice	Practice audits and patient surveys Institution audits, incident reports utilization studies Other care appraisal studies (based on the practices of peers)	2 credits per hour No maximum
6: Educational Development, Teaching, and Research Activities that involve setting standards for practice	Publications (eg, manuscript reviews) Preparation of presentations, teaching, examinations (question writing) Research (eg, grant proposals & trials) Setting standards (CPG development)	1 credit per hour Maximum of 100 credits/5 years

NOTE. Fellows will be required to earn 400 credits during 5 years of active practice by participating in educational activities of their choice.