



Coalition for Healthcare Communication's Response to ACCME's Commercial Support-Free Accredited CME Call for Comments

Background: ACCME recognizes that some stakeholders differentiate between CME that does include relationships with industry from CME that does not include relationships with industry. To clarify this differentiation, ACCME will consider creating a new designation and review process for providers that wish to identify their CME program as one that does not utilize funds from commercial interests i.e., Commercial Support-Free™.

PROPOSED POLICY

A range of standards for this definition are possible, with respect to Commercial Support-Free™ accredited continuing medical education. ACCME could take the position that these programs would:

- Not accept any commercial support for any CME activity, or any part of its CME program; and also
- Not use funds from advertising or promotion, paid by an ACCME-defined commercial interest, to underwrite the costs of continuing medical education.

RESPONSE

While there is to-date no established scientific evidence that commercial support of certified CME results in commercial bias or compromised activities, there has been much discussion about perceptions of bias. It has been suggested that there might be value in identifying *commercial support-free* CME-certified programs.

It is important to realize that all current educational guidelines, including those established by the ACCME, were created to:

1. Assure that the information and recommendations are of clinical value, are fair-balanced and are supported by the available scientific evidence.
2. Guide those stakeholders involved in developing and delivering CME to maximize the likelihood that these goals will be met.
3. Create benchmarks whereby stakeholders may be held accountable.
4. Ultimately serve the public good.

With this in mind, it is assumed that the rules, processes and goals of *commercial support-free* certified CME must, therefore, mimic those of commercially supported CME. To create another category would likely result in increased bureaucracy and confusion with no

apparent benefit other than to potentially create a “second tier” of CME programs. The issue is not one of process; but is rather one of enhanced communication.

With this in mind, it is recommended that a new category designation ***not be developed*** for *commercial support-free* certified CME. However to address the concerns of users to any potential impact of commercial support, ACCME could adopt enhanced identification standards that would enable users to easily determine if a CME activity has commercial support.

Enhanced identification could include:

1. Specific, standardized ACCME verbiage alerting users to the use or not of commercial support, or
2. A standardized statement identifying no commercial support where appropriate, including specific rules on how and where the statement should appear within the CME activity

It is assumed that programs without commercial support would be subject to the same guidelines and processes. It is further assumed that the statements apply to programs and not to accreditors, since this would place an unfair hardship on universities who are frequently involved in commercially-supported activities such as research. These commercially-supported, university-based activities have enjoyed a long history of benefiting the public.