

The following was the Academy's original submission to the *NY Times* in response to Dr. Carlet's Op Ed article regarding commercial support of CME.

In response to the June 13 Op-Ed article by Professor Daniel Carlet, I wish to express my opinion regarding his obvious ignorance of the continuing medical education (CME) process, and the rules and regulations that govern the same. He combined several issues that are not true regarding pharmaceutical companies' support of CME. He stated that "there has been a transformation "...of continuing medical education into an enterprise for drug marketing" and that "The chore of teaching doctors how to practice medicine has been handed to the pharmaceutical industry." He then went on to note continuing education credit hours are required in order for physicians to maintain their medical licenses. Dr. Carlet's innuendo that the credits physicians receive are provided directly by pharmaceutical companies shows a total lack of comprehension of the distinctions between promotion and CME.

When an educational activity is presented and honorarium is paid directly by a pharmaceutical company, it is considered promotional, not independent education, by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). Promotion must adhere to very restrictive FDA regulations regarding the information that may be presented. All content must relate only to the indications specifically approved by the FDA for the treatment under discussion.

However, when an educational activity is offered for credit by a national- or state-accredited continuing education organization (such as a for-profit or non-profit medical education company, university, hospital, or medical association), the accredited CME provider must develop and deliver such programs following very rigid requirements imposed by the Accreditation Council for Continuing Medical Education, the Department of Health and Human Services' Office of Inspector General, and the FDA. If the educational activity is supported by a grant from a pharmaceutical company, that company may not, under any circumstance, have influence on the content or faculty. Legally binding Letters of Agreement are signed by both the pharmaceutical company and the CME provider, outlining these standards and criteria. Furthermore, CME providers are required to obtain full disclosures from all faculty as to their affiliations with all relevant commercial interests, and must implement mechanisms to resolve any conflicts of interest. If, in the opinion of the accredited provider, no resolution is possible, that faculty member is not allowed to participate in either content development or as faculty.

Dr. Carlet's own institution accepts pharmaceutical support for their CME programs. As a matter of fact, on Tufts University School of Medicine Office of Continuing Education's web site, they have written within their Policy and Procedures manual their policy for accepting commercial support to "pay for all or part of the costs of a CME activity." Doesn't Dr. Carlet know his own organization accepts pharmaceutical funding for CME? When he stated, "Not so long ago, most of these courses were produced and paid for by universities," it was at a time when the funding of these courses was not disclosed to the participants, and no one knew where the money actually came from.

It is truly a disservice to the profession of medicine, the organizations that provide quality continuing medical education, and the public that the media continues to print and report on an issue that they clearly do not understand. Nor do the media seem to wish to investigate and report factual information about CME. It appears they prefer inflammatory headlines rather than integrity and understanding.

Accredited providers are also required to measure the educational effectiveness of their activities in changing physician knowledge and management of patients. It is only when physicians obtain fair balanced, non-biased, and scientifically rigorous information and continuing education from accredited CME providers that we can expect to increase knowledge and improve physician practice, thus improving patient care. As an ACCME accredited provider, my organization takes very seriously, and goes to considerable effort to create unbiased CME designed to improve patient care.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sondra L. Moylan, MS, RN". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'S'.

Sondra L. Moylan, MS, RN  
President and Founder  
American Academy of CME