

May 2011

ADA CERP Criteria Related to Scientific Content

Frequently Asked Questions

In November 2010 the ADA Council on Dental Education and Licensure approved revisions to the [ADA CERP Recognition Standards](#) and Eligibility Criteria designed to promote scientifically sound continuing dental education. This document includes answers to questions regarding the new and revised criteria. An [announcement](#) listing the specific changes is available online at <http://www.ada.org/cerp>.

What are the new requirements related to scientific content of CE courses?

Standard IX.8 previously stated that providers were responsible for ensuring that clinical and technical CE activities had a sound scientific basis and proven clinical efficacy. In its revised form, Standard IX.8 now requires that providers develop and implement specific *written* policies, procedures or guidelines to ensure that clinical and technical CE courses will be grounded in sound science. Providers are expected to implement these policies by communicating them to those responsible for planning and presenting continuing dental education programs.

Standard IX.9 is new. This criterion states that providers that offer the same course on an ongoing, or repeated basis must periodically review the course content and update as needed to ensure that it includes current scientific information and assessments of benefits and risks.

Why were these changes made to the Standards?

ADA CERP approves providers that demonstrate that they routinely meet certain basic standards of educational quality. To be eligible to participate in ADA CERP, providers must ensure that continuing education courses have a sound scientific basis in order to adequately protect the public (Eligibility Criterion 2). Because it does not approve individual continuing education courses, in order to better assess this important aspect of continuing dental education, ADA CERP revised those standards that require that providers demonstrate that they have processes in place to foster scientifically sound CE and guard against CE that might promote clinical or technical recommendations that have been proven to be ineffective or harmful.

In order to maintain compliance with Standard IX.8, must a provider develop new policies?

Providers may already have policies or practices in place for developing scientifically sound CE courses. For example, the provider's CE mission statement, or its CE policy and procedure manual, may state the provider's commitment to offering scientifically sound continuing dental education; or providers may use a peer review process to select topics and qualified speakers for future CE courses.

Providers are now asked to codify their practices in a written format so that they can be communicated to those involved in planning, developing and presenting the provider's CE program. This will enhance the provider's ability to deliver programs that consistently meet CERP standards, and will support continuity within the CE program. Providers should review existing policies and procedures to determine whether they need to be revised to include specific statements outlining the provider's practices for ensuring that clinical and technical courses have a sound scientific basis, or whether new policies, procedures or guidelines should be developed.

What elements must be included in policies and procedures related to scientific content?

CE providers should develop and implement policies and procedures appropriate to their institution and the nature of their CE program. At a minimum, policies, guidelines or procedures should state that:

- All clinical/technical courses the provider offers must include information on the scientific basis of course material and an assessment of known risks and benefits;
- When courses present clinical/technical subject matter about which scientific evidence is limited or uncertain, the course must include the level of scientific information that is available and any known risks and benefits.

In addition, providers may wish to consider Standard VII.3, approved in November 2009, which requires that CE providers direct instructors to support clinical recommendations with references from the scientific literature whenever possible.

May providers offer CE courses on new technologies or procedures about which there is little evidence available?

Continuing education may provide a forum for presenting new research and stimulating scientific exchange. Presentations on emerging technologies and therapies are within the scope of CE. Therefore, in revising the Standard, the CERP Committee eliminated the requirement that CE activities only discuss topics or techniques with “proven efficacy,” as this might be overly restrictive. However, in order to protect the public, providers must take steps to help ensure that the information presented in CE courses is supported by science accepted by the profession. In instances where scientific evidence is limited or uncertain, instructors must include information regarding the level or limitations of scientific evidence that is available. For example, instructors should be advised to disclose when limited data or studies are available, when results presented are based on a small study, or when evidence is inconclusive, such as when results are not duplicated in other studies, etc. Instructors should also be advised to include information on any known risks or benefits related to the subject matter.

How will providers be evaluated for compliance with the criteria related to scientific content?

Beginning with the Fall 2012 application cycle, providers submitting applications for recognition or continued recognition will be asked to include copies of the provider’s written policies, procedure or guidelines regarding requirements for scientifically based clinical and technical courses. Providers will also be asked to provide evidence that the policies are communicated to those involved in planning and presenting courses.

Documents demonstrating a provider’s compliance might include, but are not limited to: the provider’s CE mission statement, policy and procedure manual, course proposal or planning forms, scouting checklists, formal calls for papers or presentations, standard operating protocols for staff and volunteers, instructions or guidelines for program planners or committees, instructions or guidelines to speakers/authors, speaker agreements, etc. Measures for judging compliance with implementing the new requirement may vary based on the provider’s organizational structure and the nature of its CE program.

In the event that there are questions or concerns about a provider’s compliance with this requirement, CERP *may* ask the provider to supply additional evidence of its practices.

When will providers be required to submit documentation of policies and practices related to ensuring sound scientific content?

Providers submitting applications for recognition after January 13, 2012 will be asked to include documentation of relevant policies, procedures or guidelines. The first cohort of providers to be evaluated on compliance with the new requirements will be those submitting an application for review in Fall 2012.

Contact ADA CERP

Email: hendricksk@ada.org

Web site: <http://www.ada.org/cerp>

Phone: 312-440-2869