

Continuing Education for the Health Professional

Educational and Administrative Methods

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Continuing Education for the Health Professional

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To our families
for their patience and understanding
through the many hours and days
when they took second place
to our labors

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Preface

Over the years, we have met many people who questioned their role in continuing professional education. Too often, they complained, their responsibilities were hardly educational in nature. On the contrary, they found themselves expected to spend most of their time arranging series of "popular speaker" events, making travel arrangements, and ensuring that lunches and coffee breaks were on time. As professionals, they found few who believed that they bring special skills to their work. Many times, there was the perception that they could be easily replaced by persons at a much lower educational level. Continuing education programming was often viewed as "activities" that were relatively easy to arrange and provide.

However, recent events are changing these perceptions of continuing education. Institutions are now looking to continuing education as an additional source of funds in financially troubled times. Consumers, through their state legislatures, are mandating that health professionals spend some yearly minimum of hours in continuing education and health profession associations are requiring continuing education sponsors to demonstrate that their offerings meet minimum standards of quality.

In response to these changes, continuing education providers working with health professional audiences often find themselves unfamiliar with the use of such educational techniques as needs assessment and evaluation. Concurrently, the need to generate an increasing proportion of a continuing education program's financial support is forcing institutions to look critically at the management and marketing of such programs. Providers are increasingly in need of skills with which to manage a relatively elaborate operation.

Another event, with far-reaching impact, is the growth of the adult education movement. The growing awareness that education directed at adult learners is theoretically different from the formal schooling provided in academic health sciences centers has great significance for the continuing education provider.

Further, a scientifically based body of knowledge now exists that can be applied to continuing health professional education.

From these two events—the growing challenges to the continuing education provider and the emergence of adult learning as a theoretical base for health professional education—came the idea for this book. We recognized that continuing educators in the health professions have much in common. The process of delivering education employs the same set of principles regardless of the specific content to be taught. Also, continuing education in the health professions is generically different from continuing education in other fields. The participants' education, their work site, and the culture of the health professions itself require a different approach. However, a major deficit was the unavailability of a single volume that captured both the theoretical background and the practical application of adult learning in the real world of health professional continuing education. With this book, we have attempted to fill that void.

To best represent the different health professions, we selected as contributors outstanding national leaders in continuing health professional education. These professionals represent the variety of settings from which continuing education is offered: universities and other educational institutions, the federal government, foundations, and the private sector.

We would like to thank our contributors and our editor at Aspen for their patience through the laborious process of pulling together the individually excellent selections from our contributors into a coherent manuscript.

Introduction

Continuing health professional educators are being challenged to be more effective in delivering quality continuing education. Accrediting and approval bodies, consumers, legislators, and health professionals expect continuing education providers to demonstrate that their offerings are of high quality, responsive to professionals' needs, and effective in facilitating learning.

Financial competition is increasing as the ranks of academic institutions and professional associations are swelled by the growing number of entrepreneurs, hospitals, and drug and medical supply companies that offer continuing education. This competition is intensified as alternative learning formats—such as video, computer simulations, print, and audiovisual materials—lure participants from traditional continuing education courses. Continuing education providers who at one time thought their role to be little more than managers of relatively similar “famous-speaker” dominated events are finding a need to become more sophisticated educationally and to bring improved management skills to their work. This book is designed to assist continuing education providers to respond to these challenges and problems.

The content and design of the book have been guided by two principles:

1. You the reader, in your role as an adult learner, must make decisions about what you need to learn and how you will learn it. Further, you must identify learning that is relevant and immediately applicable in your work setting.
2. Continuing education providers serve as the intersecting point between three constituencies: the institutions they serve, the participants, and the continuing education faculty. From this perspective, continuing education providers interact with participants in response to their educational needs and interact with faculty to develop and manage those responses. These interactions are both supported and controlled by the nature of the institutions to which the providers relate.

The book is divided into three parts. Part I focuses on education approaches to health professional participants in continuing education. The characteristics of these adult learners guide the continuing education providers' educational responsibilities—from the identification of the learners' needs through the design and evaluation of the resulting educational activities.

Part II focuses on the administration of both the individual educational activities presented in Part I and the continuing education program as a whole. The perspective here is that of the organization and policies of the continuing education provider institution.

The final chapter in Part II is a reference guide on accreditation and approval of continuing education. It contains information of importance to some continuing education providers; for others, this material falls outside the educational-administrative program development process. In any event, since accreditation/approval of continuing health professional education has become a factor in most providers' programs, this chapter should provide helpful information to the reader. Part III presents a chapter on future trends, and serves as the book's epilogue. It is intended to provide the reader with some sense of future directions and possibilities in health professional continuing education.

The book's content is directed at the educational and administrative role of the continuing education provider. It is designed to:

- encourage readers to assess their own skills in the particular content area
- describe ideas and strategies to improve knowledge in the identified area
- provide suggestions for ongoing learning in the chapters' content area.

The book can be read sequentially, taking the reader systematically through the educational and management aspects of providing continuing education. However, for some readers, the book will serve as a prototypical adult learning experience; it will provide an opportunity to assess competencies and to support learning to address specific identified deficiencies. For others, the book will serve as a reference guide and problem solver.

All of the chapters in Parts I and II are organized in a similar manner. The chapter begins with a "purpose" statement, indicating its intent in terms of the knowledge and skills it provides. The purpose statement is followed by objectives in the form of a self-assessment. Each objective is related to a competency addressed in the chapter, i.e. what readers should be able to know or do as a result of reading the chapter. Readers are encouraged to review each objective and determine whether it is an area of need. If so, the section of the chapter related to the particular competency can be studied. In those cases where readers feel confident of their understanding of the competency, they may skip the related section. A summary and suggested readings complete each chapter.

We have adopted some definitions and conventions to provide consistency across chapters. “Continuing education provider” denotes the person who has the responsibility for administering, organizing and sponsoring educational activities for the health professional. The “continuing education provider unit” is the organizational element to which the continuing education provider relates. “Educational activities” include both planned and unplanned learning activities used by health professionals alone or in groups. A “course” is a discrete planned educational activity around a topic or series of related topics. A “program” describes the course offerings of the continuing education provider unit over a specified period, usually a year.

One stylistic note: We have attempted whenever possible to use plural pronouns to avoid the sexism of “he” and the gracelessness of “he/she” and its variations. Please understand that when the plural pronoun is either awkward or ridiculous we have used “he” with no slight intended.

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Part I

Educational Planning and Development