Letters to the Editor

Continuing medical education (CME): Why the fuss?

Dear Sir,

In the year 2002, the MCI introduced a new clause in its ethics code about continuing medical education (CME). It suggested that every doctor should regularly participate in CME activities, 30 credit hours every five years to be precise. This clause just remained on paper till 2010 when the Maharashtra Medical Council (MMC) came up with a notice in the newspapers that all doctors will be required to submit proof of attendance of prescribed CME credit hours in order to re-register their name with MMC every five years. This in effect means that re-registration may not be possible if a doctor fails to obtain a certain number of credit hours. Such a compulsive approach toward continuing education is certainly unwarranted.

In the first place, has the MCI conclusively found doctors wanting in the knowledge required for the practice of modern medicine? We talk about evidence-based practice all the time. So does the MCI have any statistical evidence that mandates such a step? Or has it just assumed that doctors are not keeping pace with latest developments? To convert a suggestion into compulsion without concrete evidence for its need is undemocratic. There is no mandatory continuing education for engineers or lawyers. This either means that re-registration may not be possible if a doctor fails to obtain a certain number of credit hours. Such a compulsive approach toward continuing education is certainly unwarranted.

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The everyday cases that a doctor handles, his interaction with fellow doctors from other departments, clinical meetings, journal clubs and case discussions in day-to-day practice all contribute to continuing medical education.
Reading a textbook or a journal is still the best way to learn and comprehend things. Sitting in a dark, air-conditioned lecture hall, half-asleep, just for the sake of a few credit hours is pure hypocrisy. What difference such conferences actually make to our knowledge and practice is also a debatable issue. The funniest part is that MCI has allotted the same number of credit hours for a two-day conference as for a one full year of post-graduation! Like any other profession, medical practice has also become extremely competitive and hence, a doctor has to update himself for his own sake as well as the patients’. However, the exact method of doing so varies from person to person. With so much research work going on, new theories are proposed almost daily. However, developments that are significant enough to change protocols and management guidelines do not happen everyday. They usually take a few years. And whenever such significant changes happen, they are extensively discussed and debated on so many platforms that practically everyone concerned knows about it.

The MCI needs to be reminded of the most basic thing that we were taught as medical students - “medicine is learnt at the bedside and not in the classroom”. The same applies to continuing medical education, doesn’t it?

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Dear Sir,

Your article “The business of radiology” in the Oct–Dec issue of IJRI has indeed stirred a hornets’ nest with different opinions pouring in from all over India. I waited anxiously for three months to read the responses to the article that were published in the January issue of IJRI. Interestingly, both the authors have concurred with the opinions expressed in your original article. Few radiologists have contradictory opinions and have expressed their views on various radiology-related websites on the internet.

The practice of Radiology is a business opportunity like any other business that Mr XYZ decides to embark upon. The growth of the business and the monetary returns depends not only on the business structure but also on the individual aptitudes of the person who sets up the business. There are more than 100 MBA’s passing out from various IIMs and other financial institutions all over India and not all of them get the multimillionaire salaries from multinational companies. You have rightly stated in your next article that times have changed drastically since the “golden” years of practice and the nuances of today’s practice of radiology are not everybody’s cup of tea. Today’s radiology practice involves not only good radiological skills but intricate financial and human resource management qualities that no one is born with but have to be developed over a period of time and require a Herculean effort. The question is: How many radiologists are willing to take that effort?

Today, radiologists are faced with the ever-growing problem of “erosion of turf.” Gynecologists are performing USG, neurologists are reading MRI and cardiologists are engaged in doing vascular interventional procedures. Non-radiologists are setting up their own imaging centers and hiring radiologists’ to work for them. This situation has spread its tentacles far and wide and has become a global phenomenon to the extent that non-radiologists are earning more than radiologists.

There is an urgent need for entrepreneur radiologists to set up financially viable radiology practices and run them successfully. Entrepreneurship has always been an uphill task but never an impossible one if done with the right attitude and ethical values. The average good medical college teaches the students the science of radiology but no one teaches students how to handle a business and set up a good and ethical private practice. This requires professional training, which a student can get, if he desires, by acquiring additional qualifications in Hospital Administration or Human Resource Management. I know that this would definitely add to the 11 long years of training that an average medical student spends in getting an MD degree but considering the fact that if one has to set up a successful business of radiology and be in that higher 20% earning bracket, I feel this time would be well worth it. Nonetheless, the option of learning on the job by setting up your own centre and then learning as the business expands is also open, although one might make a few mistakes in the process. But remember as the famous writer John Luther said “It is better to learn