

USPHS Scientific & Training Symposium TIPS FOR CONTINUING EDUCATION PLANNERS

The COA/COF Continuing Education Committee was established to provide assistance and consultation to individuals and groups responsible for planning educational programs that provide continuing education (CE) credits for members of a variety of health professional disciplines. We frequently hear that the availability of CE credits is one of the primary reasons why individuals attend COA/COF sponsored meetings and why organizations support that attendance. This has never been more true than in the current fiscal environment. So it is important to try to maximize the CE credits available to attendees to the fullest extent possible.

Disciplines in the health professions have a great variety of rules governing the issuance of CE credits. Since COA/COF is not directly accredited to issue credits for most disciplines, it usually works through accredited sponsors who do have that authority. Those sponsors may also have rules or policies governing their service (including time lines) that must be followed. Please understand that information requirements and time lines issued by COA/COF are necessary to ensure the CE credits that attendees need.

NEW GUIDANCE: Discussions with our accrediting partners over the last year indicate an increasing focus on having sessions address identified and objectively documented “gaps in knowledge, competency and performance” for attendees (and, obviously, filling those gaps). This can be tricky with officers because their role is a bit different than a doctor in the office and they have to be prepared for extra roles during time of crisis. However, in general the goal in developing sessions should be to focus on what the public health problem is that that a given session is addressing and how the session will help enhance an attendee’s competency or performance in addressing that problem. For example a problem might be that Commissioned Officers aren’t prepared for deployment. The next step would be to break down how that can be tackled in an educational environment. Objectives should then be tailored to highlighting how the session will improve the officer’s competency or performance. The objectives should be measurable so it’s possible to go back afterward and determine how well the presenter achieved the objectives. Competence focuses on enhancing an attendee’s capacity to address a problem. It can also be translated as providing them with “strategies” to address the problem. If you have the knowledge do you have the strategy to put it into practice? Performance is doing it. So again the focus should be on identifying the problem, determining how a session will address it and identifying measurable objectives for assessing its effectiveness in doing so.

We urge the planning committees to keep this mind as they are developing topics this year. We also will be asking your speakers during the online submission process to identify the knowledge gap their talk is intended to address and their evidence for that gap. This will be a particularly important area for categories accredited by the Indian Health Service Clinical Support Center, which are Dental, Medical, Nursing and Pharmacy. If you have any questions about this area please feel free to contact Tim O’Neill at the email address provided below.

OTHER ITEMS TO CONSIDER: Program planners should also note the following points.

1. Be aware of discipline-specific rules for granting CE credits. Category Day planners, anticipating principally members of a specific discipline, should be familiar with the latest rules issued by the organization(s) responsible for issuing or approving their CE. General session planners should also be aware of the CE policies of disciplines whose members they want to attract.
2. Develop specific and clear educational objectives for each session/program. ***There should generally be 3 objectives for each session; they should use active verbs; and they should be testable or measurable (avoid words like understand).*** Ideally, these objectives are established by the session planners in early discussion with the speakers to ensure that the program meets expectations. Obviously, all objectives need to be addressed by the presenters during the talk. The objective statement should begin with the words: “At the end of this session, participants will be able to:” Individual numbered objectives should follow, e.g.
 1. List three diagnostic tests currently used for beriberi.
 2. Identify the official position of Uruguay regarding sunscreen use.
 3. Explain the legislative history of the sea turtle preservation act of 1913.

3. Make program titles simple and descriptive. Remember that attendees usually choose to attend based on topic and presenters. Catchy titles are OK as long as they accurately convey the actual content of the program. Since CE credits are issued based on title and educational objectives, planners should try to use terms that are pertinent to all of the disciplines for which CE credit is desired. ***Session descriptions should be relatively brief (2-3 paragraphs) and should begin with an overview statement such as “This session will provide attendees with strategies to ensure that they are effectively prepared for deployment.”***
4. When scheduling concurrent sessions, planners should try to ensure that at least one session of the group is pertinent and creditable for every discipline represented by the attendees. This is not always possible, but it is usually easy to avoid a situation where time block I has three sessions creditable for engineers, but time block II has no such programs.

Questions may be addressed to the lead meeting planner Tim O’Neill, who will forward them to our committee. He can be reached at timo@leading-edge.us

CE Committee