



The Importance of CME

Coming from a martial arts background, I was one of the typical aficionados whose ultimate aim was to get that much coveted black belt. The belief was that once you strap that black strip of cloth around your waist, you are unbeatable and you have truly mastered your art. However, after attaining the black belt, my instructor with his patient smile and calm demeanour would look me in the eye and say, "Son, you have mastered nothing. This was just a teaser. The true path to mastery has just begun."

The medical field is even more complex. While most traditional martial arts are almost immutable, the medical field is constantly evolving, branching out and expanding at an inexorable pace. Guidelines and, even protocols can change on a daily basis. Common and supposedly standard practices become redundant in the blink of an eye.

Gone are the days when acquiring a membership or even fellowship in one of the prestigious Colleges was considered to be the end of the line. You would be pardoned for taking a short well-deserved break after joining the ranks of your esteemed peers, but calling it a day on your continuing medical education (CME) would be condemning yourself to a life of professional stagnation. CME is a lifelong continuing process extending throughout your professional life.

CME addresses various issues and requirements for the active practitioner:

1. Keeping up with latest developments.
2. Sharpening existing skills and learning new ones.
3. Career advancement.
4. Meeting licensing/certification requirements.
5. Earning and maintaining membership in professional organisations.
6. Preserving job satisfaction and preventing burnout.

A needs assessment precedes any attempt at organizing a CME programme, and based on those needs the programme is created. To ensure the success and viability of the programme, one has to plan for follow-up CME activities to reinforce learning, and feedback mechanisms for quality assurance purposes.

Every day the healthcare professional is bombarded by a constant flow of medical information, whether from email updates by professional and accredited organisations, Facebook notifications, journals, pharmaceutical companies and an ever growing number of sources.

One might be pardoned for thinking that one can get his or her daily dose of CME from the tabloids and social media platforms. So-called experts are preaching their sermons to their millions of followers, including professionals, and it is easy to fall in the trap of believing that fame confers credibility. On the other hand, discussions with learned and experienced colleagues often lead to new insights, knowledge and often, changes in practice.

Unfortunately, sources of reliable medical information have become the proverbial needle in the haystack.

This is where accreditation comes in. Accreditation ensures and certifies the suitability of medical education programmes as well as the competence of medical schools and other academic institutions in the delivery of medical education. Organisations like the World Federation of Medical Education and UEMS-EACCME evaluate agencies and their CME programmes against internationally-accepted criteria for accreditation. This in no way must appear as an imposition on institutions to conform to a single curriculum or standard. Each country, region and even local institution has its own particular set of cultural and social conditions, which will per necessity add diversity to a programme. One would expect an Australian doctor in the outback to focus a bit more on scorpion stings, while a doctor in Zimbabwe would do well to be up-to-date with his tropical diseases.

The internationally-accepted criteria provide a template for providers of medical education, and the agencies which accredit them to define institutional, national and regional standards. Not all of these standards will be relevant in every setting.

Another aspect is the medium of delivery. Conferences, Journal Clubs, workshops were and still are popular and highly effective forms of CME activity. The Internet era gave us another tool - e-learning.

E-learning is an umbrella term encompassing the use of electronic educational technology including electronic devices, digital media and computer software. Rushing to that late evening lecture after a harrowing day at work, (and probably snoring though the last half hour) tends to make one wary of CME events. Healthcare professional also have personal and family commitments which they must attend to and which inevitably take priority. On the other hand e-learning offers access to multiple streams of accredited medical educational material in the convenience of your home or clinic, at any time of day or night ... with the click of a mouse button.

In this regard, The Synapse is once again on the forefront of medical education in Malta. CME30.eu is a new portal providing online Continuing Medical Education in an easy and enjoyable format. The rationale behind CME30.eu is that every medical professional should at least undertake 30 minutes of CME every week. CME30.eu provides single educational sessions, masterclasses, as well as online courses. Users of CME30.eu will be able to keep track of their CME activities through their personal profiles and can also keep a record of 'off-line' CME activities by uploading certificates.

All activities are accredited for the purposes of CME by the Malta College of Family Doctors and Medical Association of Malta, as representatives of UEMS.