

Needs Assessment and Practice Gaps

The goals of continuing medical education have changed during the past few years. CME is now based on the concepts of quality improvement in order to achieve and maintain physician competence and performance. The end result of CME is the improvement in patient health status.

Both individual educational activities (e.g., conferences) and series activities (e.g., grand rounds) are designed around identified practice gaps. The term, professional practice gap, is defined as the difference between what a physician currently knows and is doing and what he or she should know and do.

Identifying professional practice gaps is a straightforward process, utilizing the following questions:

- What areas in practice do you and your colleagues find challenging? (examples include: difficult-to-manage or non-resolvable cases; prevalent public health problems; lifestyle-related health problems; patient safety concerns; limitations or obstacles occurring in the healthcare system)
- What factors contribute to the problem?
- What educational interventions are needed to change current behavior to 'best practices' behavior? (or what does the target audience need to do differently in order to improve practice?)
- What is the best format for teaching and learning the concepts to be presented? (examples include: case presentation and discussion, demonstration, expert panel, lecture and discussion, moderated audience discussion, problem analysis and application to practice, question and answer session, role play, simulation, self-directed learning, skill development, or small group discussion)
- What additional educational or non-educational strategies must be incorporated in order for the target audience to achieve 'best practice' behavior?