

Continuing Education and You

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Acupuncturists, like many professionals, have to take Continuing Education (also called Professional Development Activity) classes to keep their licenses current. The specifics vary from state to state and from state to the National Certification Commission for Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine (NCCAOM) licensure. I would like to touch on some common denominators that affect all of us.

During my first year of practice, I went to an acupuncture conference to take some Continuing Education classes. There was a combination of really great teachers: world renowned acupuncturists, acupuncturists visiting from Japan, and some of the best teachers I ever had in school, all in one place. You could take classes on many different subjects. I thought it was awesome.

I saw my fellow acupuncturists scrambling to get every CEU (Continuing Education Unit) they could possibly fit in, even one-hour *qi gong* classes. Some of them were outright angry because they were in a rush to fulfill their CEU quotas and didn't like many of the classes they were taking. Is that really good for your *qi*? Probably not. I'm glad I had this experience early on because I resolved right then and there to get the most out of my CEUs and to take classes I actually liked.

Here are two useful tips to get the most out of your Continuing Education experience:

- Take classes you like - Ask other acupuncturists for recommendations of good teachers. Take classes with teachers you like or those with whom you have always wanted to study. Why waste your time, *qi* and money taking classes you don't like?
- Get more bang for your buck - There can be a huge discrepancy in the cost of CEUs. Some classes can be very expensive. Again, it pays to ask other acupuncturists for advice on this one. But in some cases, it may be your only chance to study with a well-known acupuncturist and you won't care about the cost of the class.



There are free one or two-unit CEUs available from some herb and supplement suppliers. These can help fill in the gaps in your requirements. And some suppliers will offer discounts on their products when you take a class from them.

If you hold a national and a state license, see if there is crossover in approved credits for one class. This will make your life a lot easier. In my case, I try to make sure that at least some of my classes are NCCAOM (National Certification Commission for Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine) approved as well as California Acupuncture Board approved.

Traveling to a conference can also be helpful because you can get many CEUs fulfilled in a very short period of time. Conferences are also a good way to network with other practitioners and to get information and samples from different herb companies and other acupuncture-related suppliers.

Sometimes the cost of travel to conferences may be too much for you at the start of your practice. The Internet makes it easier to take classes you like without the added cost of travel. But be careful: there may be a limit to how much of your classes can be taken online. (In California, it's 50 percent.) You can take distance learning classes in the form of slideshows, audio recordings, conference calls and now some classes are being offered as live webinars.

Make sure the class is in a language you speak or that there will be an interpreter. I went to a conference once where they only got an interpreter after a few people asked for one. Unfortunately the interpreter didn't show up for another few hours.

Deadlines and paperwork: Keep a list of the classes you're taking and set reminders in your calendar to make sure you submit your forms in time, or better yet, early. You don't want to end up

like I did last year, at the mercy of a really nice lady from the NCCAOM who helped me out when I had forgotten to fulfill one requirement for licensure renewal. Luckily I had submitted my paperwork a little early so I had time to get caught up.

But wait there's more! At least for the NCCAOM, you can get some CEUs for doing things other than taking classes. Included in the list are additional NCCAOM certification (20 points maximum), Donating Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine (10 points maximum), Teach or Lecture (20 points maximum) and writing or editing books, journals or articles (number of points vary).

It takes a bit of organization to stay on top of all the continuing education requirements, but it's necessary to keep our licenses current. Try to think of continuing education as kind of a gift; Continuing Education mean we are always learning about our medicine and profession. For more information about recertification, please contact your state acupuncture board, governing body or the NCCAOM.

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