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Importance of continuing education in optometry

Why is Continuing education (CE) important and why does it matter?

We are often asked this question as to why it is important to have continuing education in your professional career. After all, you have

- finished your degree
 - completed all the exams successfully and have all the practical skills required
 - appeared for a campus interview and your job is all lined up
- MISSION ACCOMPLISHED!!**

It's true that the mission is accomplished, however, if you as a health care professional sit back, then it will not be too long before you are lagging behind your colleagues. The same holds for practitioners with several years of experience in the profession.

Continuing education is important because it ensures that a professional continues to be competent in his/her profession. It is an ongoing process and needs to continue throughout a professional's career. Well-designed continuing education programs are very important as it benefits both the optometrists, and more importantly the public who trust us with their eyes.

With this in mind, the Optometry Council of India (OCI) has developed guidelines to assist optometrists meet the standard requirements for registration to the OCI, and also provides guidance for providers of optometric education seeking accreditation of CE activities, and for accredited providers for maintaining their accreditation status.

The ultimate outcomes that OCI expects to achieve out of this CE module is to safeguard

- the interest of the public as we are health care professionals
- your employer so that (s)he is aware that the professional (s)he has employed is up to standards
- the optometrist itself and his/her career

OPTOMETRY
COUNCIL OF INDIA

Guidelines for continuing education development

1. Authority

These guidelines for continuing education (CE), for practicing optometrists have been developed by the Optometry Council of India (OCI), a self - regulatory body established in September 2012. The OCI is a nonprofit company under section 25A of the Company Act of India.

2. Continuing education activities

Once registered with the Optometry Council of India (OCI), optometrists are required to undertake CE activities to maintain their registration status, and for renewal of their registration status in future.

CE activities are classified broadly into four main sections, and several activities are available under each of the four sections. Points are allocated for each activity (see Tables below), depending on the feasibility, achievability, and difficulty. A minimum of 50 points spread over at least two of the four main categories are expected to be completed within 3 years from the time of registration. The Board will publish CE templates on its website to assist optometrists to meet this requirement. Still, individual optometrists are responsible for developing his/her plan of activities to complete, and are encouraged to develop a balanced set of CE activities covering a range of activities catering to their professional role. Specifically, optometrists should make an assessment of gaps in their knowledge in both clinical and non-clinical areas, and identify areas in which skills needs to be improved. Additionally, optometrists should consider topics of interest to them, and format of activities that is offered.

Types of activities

The table below lists the activities: (Table 1)

I. Scholarly Activity

CATEGORY	DESCRIPTION	POINTS	EXAMPLES
RESEARCH and PUBLICATION	Publication of an article in an international journal	10 pts 1 st AUTHOR 5 pts 2 nd AUTHOR	Optometry & Vision Science (OVS) Journal of BCLA, CL Spectrum
	Publication of an article in a national / state journal	5 pts 1 st AUTHOR 3 pts 2 nd AUTHOR	Indian Journal of Ophthalmology(IJO)/ Indian Optician or Optic Plus
PRESENTATION IN A CONFERENCE	In an international conference	(TALK) 10 pts 1 st AUTHOR / PRESENTER 5 pts 2 nd AUTHOR	American Academy of Optometry / ARVO/APOC/BCLA
		(POSTER) 5 pts 1 st AUTHOR / PRESENTER 3 pts 2 nd AUTHOR	

	In a national / state conference	(TALK) 5 pts 1 st AUTHOR / PRESENTER 3 pts 2 nd AUTHOR (POSTER) 3 pts 1 st AUTHOR / PRESENTER 2 pts 2 nd AUTHOR	Indian Optometry Association / EV session/ AIOC meetings
PATENTS	After a patent has been filed and granted to single or group of optometrists	20 pts 1 st RESEARCHER 10 pts 2 nd RESEARCHER 3 pts each to all others in the group	Hand held Fundus Camera

II. Educational Activity

CATEGORY	DESCRIPTION	POINTS	EXAMPLES
Educator in a Continuing Education Program OR Industry sponsored programs	Conducting a lecture or a tutorial	2 pts per hour of lecture + 2 pts if program has assessment at the end	Educators on behalf of corporate like B&L ALCON /J&J / ESSILOR / ZEISS
	Conducting practical or hands on trainings	4 pts per hour of lecture	Workshops on dispensing or CL etc
Cases	Submission of interesting case with all the details of the management of the case	1 pt per case submission and minimum 5 cases per year	Cases like Glaucoma/ Diabetic Retinopathy/Squint/High myopia etc
	In addition to submission also if, differential diagnosis / discussion of other cases with research reference / questions and answers	2 pts per case submission and minimum 10 cases per year	Elaboration of case presentation in comparison to earlier publications
Webinar	Conducting a webinar training	2 pts per hour of lecture	IACLE / IVI lectures

III. Recipient Activity

CATEGORY	DESCRIPTION	POINTS	EXAMPLES
Webinars	Attending a webinar training	1 pt per hr of attendance	Attending any lecture on WebEx
Lectures in online platforms	Attending lectures online through internet	1 pt per hr of attendance	Attending any lecture on Skype
Attending Conferences	International Conferences	10 pts per day	AAO / ARVO / APOC / BCLA
	National Conference	5 pts per day	IOA / EV session / AIOC
Industry sponsored Continued Education Program		1 pt per hr of attendance + 1 pt if program has assessment at the end	Master Mind (B&L) / Corneal lens Clinic (ALCON) etc

IV. Skills Up gradation

CATEGORY	DESCRIPTION	POINTS	EXAMPLES
Fellowships	International	10 pt for completion of fellowship	FBDO / COVD etc
	National	5 pt for completion of fellowship of a minimum duration of 3 months	Fellowships on Low vision (Lotus college of optometry) / clinical optometry(LV Prasad eye institute) etc
Completion of additional degree	Completion of Bachelors / Masters or PhD	25 points for upgrading his / her qualification	Upgrading from Diploma to Bachelors or Bachelors to Masters or Masters to PhD

Records of CE points

All optometrists should maintain a portfolio containing up-to-date records of CE points collected. The portfolio of CE points should contain the citations of publications, conference presentations, patents, and list of cases (for activities listed under scholarly activity), the title of webinars or skype lectures along with the number of hours attended or the number of days and the name of the conference(s) or industry sponsored programs attended (in case of recipient activities), certificates of completion of degrees (for skills up gradation). Educators should maintain records of the title of lectures and number of hours of lectures/ hands-on training conducted (for educational activities). Additionally optometrists are expected to produce receipt of registration for a conference, brochures provided during industry sponsored CE activities and certificate of attendance. If there is an assessment at the end of the program, and if copies of test sheets are returned to the optometrists, then they are expected to maintain these records as well. The OCI website will soon make available templates for recording the CE points.

3. Compliance

The OCI at any time may request a registered optometrist to provide their CE records for audit by the members of the OCI Board. In the course of an investigation arising from a complaint against an optometrist, the board may require the registered optometrist to provide their CE records. Failure to comply may result in the OCI cancelling an optometrist's registration and/or declining the renewal of an applicant's registration.

4. Renewal of registration

To be eligible for renewal of registration, an Optometrist should have accumulated a minimum of 50 CE points through completion of various activities within three years from the date of registration. Of the minimum 50 points, a maximum of only 25 points can be accumulated from activities in any one of the four major categories. Therefore the Optom has to gain the remaining 25 points from either one or all of the remaining three major categories.

Optometrists are encouraged to collect more than 50 points in case some points are rejected by the board. Documents are to be maintained regarding the activities being undertaken. At the time of renewal of an optometrist's registration as an OCI member, (s) he must make a declaration that (s) he has the required number of CE points, and provide documentation of CE points. Note that CE points during one registration period of 3 years do not carry over to the next registration period. Registered optometrists who do not satisfy the requirements may be denied renewal. However, in exceptional cases, the Board may provide exemptions

5. Exemptions

Under exceptional circumstances, the board would consider providing exceptions. If an optometrist feels that (s) he might not be able to complete the required number of CE points, then (s) he should apply in writing to the board seeking an exemption. Depending on individual cases and circumstances, the Board may or may not grant exemptions. If an exemption is provided, the Board will decide the number of points to be exempted, and the optometrist will have to complete the points not exempted before applying for renewal of registration. The board's decision will be final.

6. Feedback on quality of activities

The OCI is interested in ensuring that there is a range of quality activities for optometrists to meet the CE requirements. Optometrists concerned about the quality of the CE activity that they have undertaken are encouraged to notify the OCI in writing.

7. Information for providers of continuing education

To be eligible for gaining the accredited provider status, a CE activity provider has to register with the OCI (Currently at no cost). The accredited provider then has to provide a list containing details such as the agenda of the CE activity, the speaker and their qualifications, number of hours of lecture and/ number of hours of practical's/tutorial/hands on workshops etc.to get the CE activity accredited. After approval from the OCI, the course can then be advertised by the provider as accredited by OCI, and can carry the OCI logo. The providers are advised to look-up table 1 and assign the number of CE points.

A document containing detailed information for providers of CE activities will be made available soon by the OCI board.

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