

Common/Not-So-Common Case Conundrums in CME

Case 2

As you casually slalom through morning traffic while scrolling through your email on your phone, one message stops you in your tracks (luckily the woman in the car behind you was paying attention).

The message is from your grand rounds coordinator. It reads as follows:

“Margaret sent me copies of the certificates that they issue after each Grand Rounds session for the Remoteville unit. I told her that I wasn’t aware that they were issuing certificates, and that they are actually supposed to be sent from the CME office upon request. I noticed that the wording on the certificates for the MDs is incorrect.

She said that they have older physicians that have retired, and they want the certificates at the end of the sessions since they don’t use the Internet or email. The administrative contact for Remoteville is Pat Walker, who is out on Medical Leave. The attendance hasn’t been entered for the September sessions. She asked if they could go ahead and give out certificates since they are having a session today at 11. “

Even after 2.5 years on the job, you still feel a little like an ACCME neophyte. You find that you can follow orders much more easily than you can interpret policy, so when you get to the office, you have a quick huddle with your team.

“Is it OK for the unit in Remoteville to hand out their own certificates?” you ask to mostly blank stares.

No one seems sure whether or not this presents a compliance problem.

You keep trying. “Do we have any records on how this came policy about?”

Your coordinator spends the next few hours going through past applications in your system and electronic records, but finds nothing concrete. Apparently, whoever created this arrangement is long gone. You have back-to-back meetings from 9-12, so you ask your coordinator to contact Margaret.

“Just ask her to hold off on handing out any certificates for their session today and tell her we’ll look into this,” you instruct before heading off to your meeting.

The morning zips by. When you get back to your office, there’s a voice mail from Dr. Waverly, Director of Educational Activities at the Remoteville unit, asking you to get back in touch with her as soon as possible.

You call her and explain your position. She’s very polite but obviously a little irked that this is taking up a valuable part of her day – probably the 10 minutes she has to wolf down a sandwich between meetings

and clinic. She tells you that Remoteville has been issuing paper certificates at the end of grand rounds sessions “since forever.”

“Remoteville is the only sponsor of any activity like this in the 5-county region,” she tells you. “A lot of the physicians who come in are retired or close to retirement, but they really like to come on campus and attend these sessions. They also contribute to offset a substantial portion of the cost that keeps these sessions going.”

While she understands that there should be a process behind recording attendance and handing out certificates, she’s hopeful that a solution can be worked on that satisfies all parties. You tell her that you will research the issue a bit further, talk more with your team, and get back to her within a week with your recommendation.

Questions for Discussion:

1. Does this current policy violate ACCME standards? If so, how?
2. In your mind, what are the primary issues that need to be addressed and which, perhaps, are not as critical?
3. Would it be worth a call to the ACCME to get their input or would that draw unneeded attention to you?
4. What would you suggest to your team as a possible solution? Is there any win-win scenario?

1. What does the ACCME and AMA have to say about this practice?
2. Is it a good practice for an accredited group?
3. What alternatives might be available?

Following discussion and determination that this is not a standards violation:

4. If a CME office needed to accommodate the practice, what should it do to ensure it complies with all applicable standards?