

# MANAGING CME ABOUT CONTROVERSIAL TOPICS

Cheryl Stearley

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There are many topics in the field of medicine that remain experimental, unproven and/or unconventional.

It's essential that clinicians are informed about the full range of approaches their patients may be using, and that CME is a place where clinicians can learn about and debate controversies.

# ACCME Issues Comments

<http://www.accme.org/highlights/managing-cme-about-medical-marijuana-rules-risks-and-strategies>

The ACCME encourages accredited providers to embrace the opportunity to address controversial topics, as CME is an ideal place for discussions about evolving issues in medicine.

When considering how to construct these activities, CME providers should apply the same prudent planning process that they do for other activities that address areas of medicine that are evolving, unproven, or experimental.

Clinicians should be able to trust that accredited CME activities are evidence-based and balanced.

As described in the [CME Clinical Content Validation Policy](#), accredited CME providers are responsible for validating clinical content to ensure that education supports safe, effective patient care. This responsibility belongs to the accredited CME provider — whether the activity is directly provided or jointly provided.

# Clinical Recommendations

It's important for recommendations to be rooted in **science, evidence, and data**. The validity of clinical recommendations is not determined by legislation or advocacy.

To protect the integrity of accredited CME and of the clinician/patient relationship, all patient care recommendations must be based on evidence that is **accepted within the profession of medicine and all scientific research used to support patient care recommendations must conform to generally accepted standards of experimental design, data connection, and analysis.**

# Strategies to Facilitate

Several strategies can be utilized to facilitate discussion about controversial topics without promoting unscientific care recommendations in accredited CME activities.

- Set firm parameters for faculty: explain that they can facilitate debate and discussion about controversial topics without recommending diagnostic or treatment approaches that have not reached scientific consensus or teaching clinicians how to use or perform those treatments or interpret those tests.

# Strategies to Facilitate

- Construct the activity as a debate or dialogue. Choose faculty who represent a range of opinions and perspectives; presentations should include a balanced, objective view of research and treatment options.
- Design the activity to teach about the merits and limitations of a therapeutic or diagnostic approach rather than how to use it.

# Strategies to Facilitate

- Identify content that has not been accepted as scientifically meritorious by regulatory and other authorities, or when the material has not been included in scientifically accepted guidelines or published in journals with national or international stature.
- Encourage faculty to clearly describe the level of evidence on which the presentation is based and to provide sufficient information about data (study dates, design, etc.) to enable learners to assess research validity.



# Strategies to Facilitate

- Clearly communicate the objectives of the activity to faculty and learners. For example, “This activity will teach you about how your patients may be using XX therapy and how to answer their questions. It will not teach you how to administer XX therapy.”

# Key Points to Consider

The following are key points to consider if you plan to construct CME activities about controversial topics, such as the use of medical marijuana.

# Ensure Independence from Commercial Interests

Companies involved in the production, marketing, reselling, or distributing of medical marijuana fall under the definition of an ACCME-defined commercial interest. That means that all the rules related to commercial interests apply.

These companies are not eligible for accreditation and accredited providers cannot engage in joint providership with them.

It also means that employees of medical marijuana companies, just like employees of other commercial interests, cannot participate as faculty and planners or in other roles where they are in a position to control the content of accredited CME.

# Resolving Conflicts of Interest

In addition to prohibiting or constraining the role of commercial interest employees, it is your responsibility to meet the expectations of [Standard 2](#):

You need to identify and resolve conflicts of interest if anyone in a position to control content, including your planners or faculty, disclose that they have relevant financial relationships with medical marijuana companies.

# Ensure Balance

Remember that when information about treatments is emerging, highly publicized, and controversial, there can be a tendency to prematurely embrace clinical recommendations that are not justified by science.

# Ensure Balance

Again, it's important to ensure that your content experts review the most recent data relevant to your learners. They need to apply the same level of scrutiny to evidence about benefits as they do to harms and risks.

Be aware that many experts are also advocates, and it is your responsibility as an accredited provider to maintain the boundary between accredited CME and advocacy.

# Ensure Balance

Ensure that your activities present a balanced perspective and cover the range of diagnostic or therapeutic options for a given scenario.

Discussion of unconventional treatments or therapies can shift the focus away from the appropriate discussion of benefits and risks of conventional management. Shifting the focus away from potentially effective care by offering an unproven alternative can be harmful to patients.



# No Exceptions for Content Validity

All the activities offered by accredited providers must comply with the CME Clinical Content Validation Policy.

It is not acceptable to offer education that does not meet content validity standards even if those activities are not accredited or certified for credit.

# Final Thoughts Specific to Medical Marijuana

As medical marijuana becomes more available in communities across the country, patients and their clinicians are increasingly seeking information about its efficacy and potential use in care.

Accredited CME providers can serve as a trusted source, giving clinicians the accurate information they need to deliver safe and effective care and to answer their patients' questions.