

# Physician and Surgeon (MD) Continuing Medical Education (CME) Frequent Questions

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## **Where can I reference the specific rules pertaining to continuing medical education requirements for physicians?**

Please refer to Washington Administrative Code [WAC 246-919-430](#) through [470](#) regarding continuing medical education (CME) requirements for physicians. Please also refer to [WAC 246-12](#), Administrative Procedures and Requirements for Credentialed Health Care Providers. Part 7 of this chapter specifically addresses CME, when it is required, how to prove compliance, auditing, acceptable auditing documentation, exemptions, how credit hours are determined, carrying over CME credits, and taking the same course more than once during a reporting cycle. The requirements of [WAC 246-12](#) apply to all health care practitioners; use will be in conjunction with [WAC 246-919-430](#), for physicians.

## **When can I start accumulating hours?**

You may start accumulating CME hours upon first renewal up through your 2nd renewal cycle. You will need to attest to the completed 200 hours every four years.

## **What is a credit “hour” for continuing education?**

[WAC 246-12-220](#) states in part: “a credit hour is defined as time actually spent in a course or other activities as determined by the regulatory entity.” A credit hour for time actually spent in a course cannot be less than 50 minutes, (excluding breaks).

## **How often must I report CME hours to the state?**

Every four years at the time of renewal physicians must report 200 hours of CME. Failure to report CME renders the renewal invalid and your license will be non-renewable.

## **Do I need to send in paper documentation of my continuing education coursework along with my renewal? Will you approve continuing education courses for credit?**

NO! Please do not send in any of your documentation until you receive a request to do so. You will be required to sign an affidavit of compliance (on the back of your renewal notice.) The Medical Quality Assurance Commission (Commission) may randomly audit up to 25% of all renewals as allowed by [WAC 246-12-190](#). Following your renewal, you may receive a notification of an audit. Only then, will you be

required to provide actual written documentation of the dates and hours of the CME that you have obtained and reported with your renewal. The Commission will not keep your documentation on file, nor will we approve coursework. Please keep your CME documentation in an accessible manner for at least four years after the renewal period. In the event of an audit, you will want to be able to easily access your information. There is more information about acceptable audit documentation included in chapter [WAC 246-12](#), Part 7.

### **How many categories of continuing medical education are required?**

There are five categories of CME for physicians located in [WAC 246-919-450](#). There are no minimum requirements or specific subject matter in any CME Categories at this time. Category II through V has a maximum of 80 hours per 4-years (two-renewal cycles). Keep in mind that requirements of CME may change at any time due to new rules or legislation.

The Commission believes the intent of CME is to improve and enhance the professional development of the physician, and to improve the care provided to a patient. We strongly suggest that physicians accumulate hours from a broad range of categories.

NOTE: on Category II: It is the responsibility of the physician to determine if his or her course work falls under Category I or II. Most hospitals are not CME Category I accredited, so be sure to check with the hospital before reporting. Hospital staff meetings and specialty groups are some examples of Category II.

### **Can I count continuing education hours I accumulate for other sources, (i.e. national certification with specialty organizations, etc.) towards this requirement?**

Yes. [WAC 246-919-430\(2\)](#) provides the ability for physicians to use a current certification physician's recognition award of the American Medical Association, or a current certification from any specialty board approved by the American Board of Medical Specialties (ABMS) in lieu of 200 hours of CME. You must obtain the certification in the four years preceding the renewal.

There is one exception. If the Commission disciplines your license, and CME coursework is required as a disciplinary sanction, you must accumulate the renewal requirement in addition to the sanction requirements.

### **Can I count my hours accumulated during Residencies and Fellowships programs?**

Yes. These can count in Category I for 50 hours each year, up to 200 hours. Make a note on the affidavit that the 200 hours are for a residency or fellowship. Fractional credits are possible for partially complete years.

## **We want to put on a continuing education course. What do we have to do to have it approved?**

The Commission does not pre-approve CME coursework.

WAC 246-919-470(2) states in part that CME sponsors do not need to apply for prior commission approval for a formal CME program. The CME category will depend solely upon the accredited status of the organization or institution. The Commission relies upon the integrity of the program sponsors to present CME for licensees that constitute a meritorious learning experience.

## **Can I carry over continuing education hours from one four year cycle to the next?**

No. There is no carrying forward to the next reporting cycle of CMEs in excess of the required hours.

## **Where can I review/obtain a copy of the Medical Practice Act, with the updates of recent legislation, and other pertinent information?**

This information is accessible by clicking on the link on this website to Laws / Rules ([RCW 18.71](#)) and Rules ([WAC 246-919](#)), as well as other pertinent Laws / Rules regarding the practice of medicine on this website.

With the passing of legislation, or the amending or new adoption of rules takes place, it usually takes the Office of the Code Reviser for the state of Washington approximately three months to get the changes codified into the law. You may also sign up for Listserv notification via e-mail by going to our website. Through this service you will receive notification via e-mail of the Commission's agendas, minutes, rule development and adoptions, and other pertinent information.

## **When is a practitioner exempt from continuing education?**

A physician may get a reprieve from or granted an extension of CME requirements due to illness or other extenuating circumstances. The Commission or its designee will determine when to waive the requirements or grant an extension. This may take a while, please submit information prior to your renewal date. Contact the office at 360-236-2750 for further information.