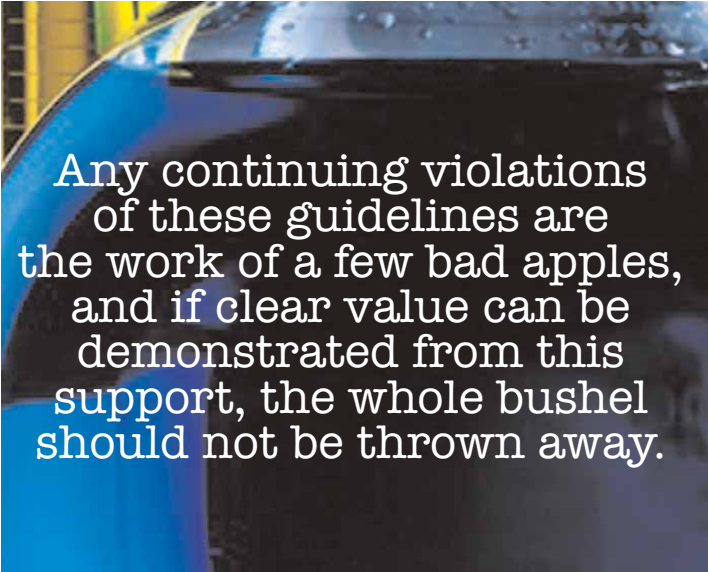


The Value of Pharma-Supported CME

By supporting education programs that span brands, explain emerging technologies, and address clinical challenges, pharma support plays a valuable role improving healthcare outcomes and meeting business needs.

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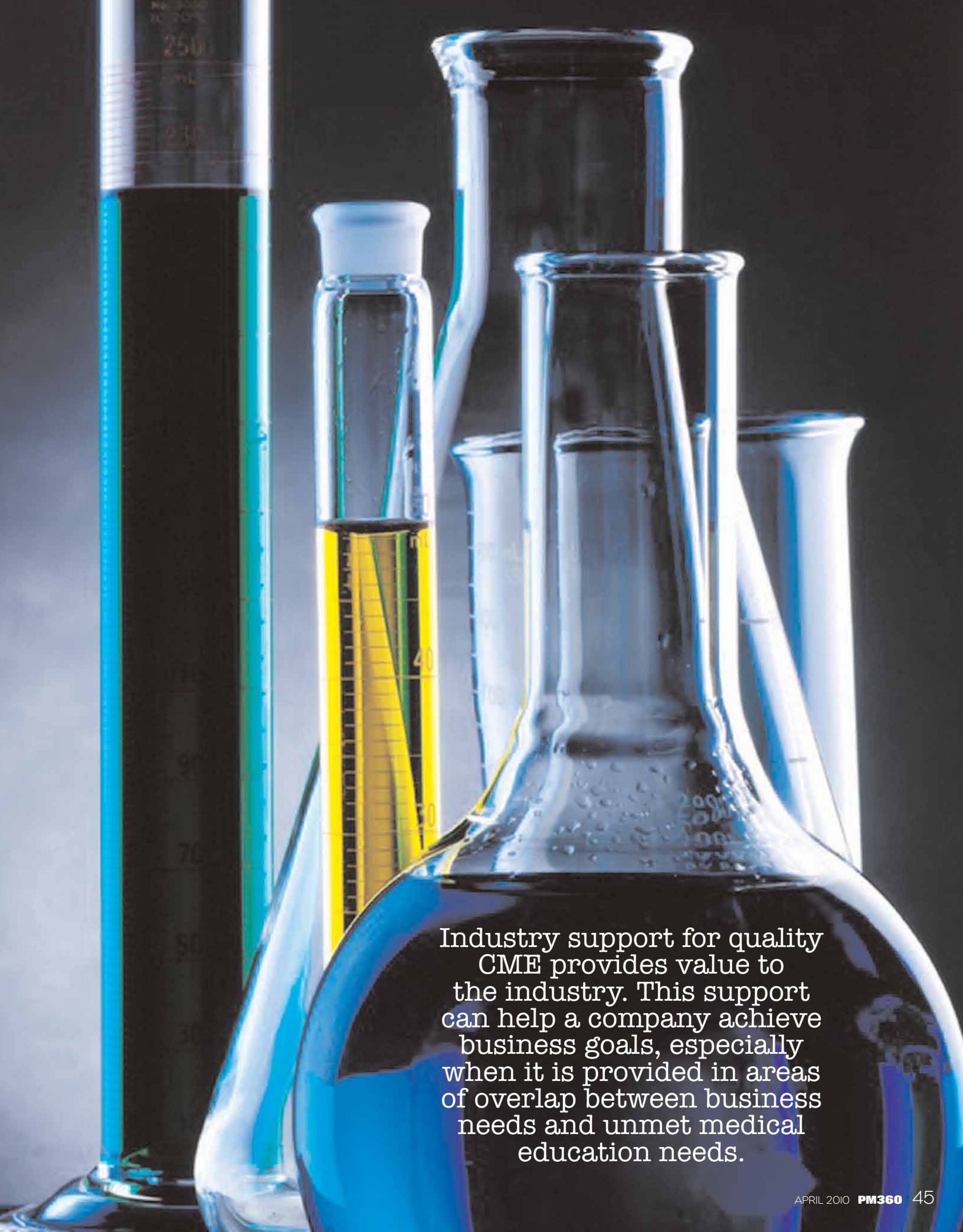
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PHARMACEUTICAL INDUSTRY SUPPORT FOR Continuing Medical Education (CME) provides value to both healthcare and pharmaceutical industries. Pharmaceutical support is valuable to both healthcare providers and business leaders when used to support independent education programs, promote quality CME programs, and drive improvements in healthcare provision. Yet industry support continues to face criticism from external stakeholders who question the effects of this support on education and from internal stakeholders who question the value and risks. To meet both of these challenges, the following recommendations are provided for pharmaceutical industry directors of medical education to help counter these criticisms and demonstrate their valuable role in CME support.

THE CRITICS

Critics of pharmaceutical CME support include government regulatory agencies, academic bodies, industry watchdogs, and physicians' societies. These critics have two main arguments. First, they cite examples where pharmaceutical industry support for CME has been used inappropriately for thinly disguised marketing presentations. However, over the last few years, the industry has gone to great lengths to follow the guidelines regarding CME content development and delivery issued by the Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America (PhRMA) and the Accreditation Council for Continuing Medical Education (ACCME). Arguably, any continuing violations of these guidelines are the work of a few bad apples, and if clear value can be demonstrated from this support, the whole bushel should not be thrown away.

Second, critics claim that industry support creates "inherent biases" in healthcare provider education. However, this argument assumes that healthcare providers are incapable of critically



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analyzing information presented to them, and physicians have expressed their displeasure at this portrayal in numerous articles and online forums. Additionally, independent studies have failed to find evidence for this claim. Still, this argument continues to surface and critics of industry support seek increased restrictions or outright bans on industry involvement.

With regulations on what medical education departments can do, the threat of growing restrictions, and fines for noncompliance, critics have also surfaced inside pharmaceutical companies who question the value and risk of medical education support for the company. To counteract these internal and external critics, pharmaceutical industry directors of medical education need to demonstrate to both of them the value of medical education support. By demonstrating a beneficial compliant role for the industry, these CME directors can also mitigate perceptions of risk.

THE VALUE

Healthcare providers rely on high-quality CME for licensure maintenance, to help them translate knowledge into practice, and/or to keep up-to-date on the ever-increasing body of knowledge in their field including new requirements, treatments, and procedures. The pharmaceutical industry currently provides funding support for a significant portion of CME programs. By some estimates, a loss of this support would result in a 23% decrease in academic CME course offerings. This is the direct value of pharmaceutical support to CME and healthcare providers. However, there is additional value that industry support can and in many cases does provide.

Many pharmaceutical medical education departments contain well-trained and respected education experts who set and implement strategies to raise the standards of CME. For example, many have shifted their funding dollars away from attendance-based large dinner meetings to professional development-focused programs that demonstrate more impact on treatment practices and patient health.

Industry support for quality CME programs also provides value to the industry. Support for education programs is consistent with corporate mission statements to improve patient healthcare and well-being, and the public recognition for this support helps demonstrate this commitment. In addition, this support can also help the company achieve business goals, especially when it is provided in areas of overlap between business needs and unmet medical education needs. Examples of education programs and initiatives that exist in this overlap include the following:

- **Initiatives that span across brands.** These include education on treating patients who present multiple symptoms and illnesses at once. These programs benefit the industry by addressing issues such as clinical practice guidelines and patient adherence, which impact drug therapy choice and compliance.

- **Programs on emerging treatments and technologies.** By providing CME funding in areas of new business development as a part of early commercial planning efforts, the industry helps ensure that healthcare providers understand the science and technology behind innovations and enable more rapid adoption.
- **Programs addressing “Clinical Challenge” issues.** These types of programs may target specific populations (senior care, a disease state in minority groups) and include ways to improve their care through more effective screening that identifies undiagnosed diseases. By providing funding for these types of programs, in areas of commercial interest, the industry can benefit through potential market expansion.
- **Community programs.** Education programs at the local community level, in areas of commercial interest, can address local barriers to adoption and have a strong demonstrable effect on healthcare provider behavior, making them a good educational investment.

While these examples highlight their benefits for industry, they also demonstrate the “win-win” in value that industry support in areas of overlapping need can provide for healthcare providers, patients, and the industry.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Industry medical education directors need to demonstrate the value of their support for CME to internal stakeholders to retain their budgets, and to external stakeholders to prevent further restrictions on their role in the funding provision. The following recommendations are provided to demonstrate the value of pharmaceutical support for CME to both internal and external critics.

- 1. Promote rigorous standards for independence and quality of support.** Companies should be “squeaky clean” regarding independence of CME grant decision-making and internal commercial interests. Most companies have already separated CME funding decision-making from Sales and Marketing functions, but making the grant decision-making process as transparent as possible is another way to highlight their independence. Examples include Pfizer’s and Eli Lilly’s disclosure of awarded grants and many companies’ disclosures of grant selection criteria. Independence and transparency are needed to repair the damage done by previous inappropriate use of CME funding.

Companies should also support only the highest-quality CME programs that meet or exceed ACCME standards. This includes well-designed programs that are based on established medical needs and that can demonstrate their impact through quality outcome metrics. These outcomes go beyond measuring attendance or participant satisfaction with an education program. They measure changes in healthcare provider behavior or improvements in patient safety or care.

2. Use funding resources to raise the standards for CME.

When industry funding and resources are used to support only high-quality CME, this funding also becomes a force for CME quality improvement. CME providers must design better education programs to obtain this funding, healthcare providers benefit from better programs designed to meet their needs, and patients benefit from better healthcare outcomes.

Working within existing guidelines, medical education departments can also dedicate resources to spearheading new quality of medical learning initiatives. For example, a company could publicize that they are offering support for programs that incorporate evidence-based medical standards, new techniques or technology, or that encourage the development, sharing, and common usage of education program outcomes that demonstrate performance and patient health changes. This would help pharmaceutical companies demonstrate a beneficial compliant role for industry funding—raising the standards for CME.

3. Focus support on areas of overlap between medical education and business needs.

As part of a company's strategic effort, it must first identify overlapping areas of need between commercial interests and medical education needs. This requires cross-functional communication between CME specialists and their commercial colleagues to share knowledge of existing gaps in medical education. Some pharmaceutical medical education departments have created a brick wall between themselves and commercial colleagues, yet communications for strategy purposes enable information sharing about external needs and business interests, including early commercial planning efforts. This enables synergies between overlapping internal efforts, for instance, external needs analyses.

To identify and focus on these areas of overlap, many companies will need to overcome an additional challenge. If pharmaceutical medical education departments receive most of their funding from brand teams but the areas of overlap span across brands, there may not be resources available for programs that span across brands or address clinical challenges. Educating commercial colleagues on the value of funding these types of programs is required. This is also where funding programs that produce high-quality outcome metrics pay off, since they provide evidence of the value of these programs to internal stakeholders.

4. Provide education outcomes to demonstrate value to internal and external stakeholders.

CME directors need to share and publicize how the funding of high-quality outcomes-based programs result in healthcare provider performance improvement and/or patient health outcomes. For example, if a CME director can share how a program resulted in greater detection rates for diseases in a population, this demonstrates the ability of industry support to play a beneficial role in education program improvement efforts. Sharing these outcomes throughout the industry also

enables this funding to have further impact on healthcare providers and patients.

One recommendation for helping to ensure that funded education programs provide quality outcomes measures is to award multi-year/multi-event grants. Through multiple touches, these programs can reach broader audience targets and support broader learning initiatives. This makes programs more likely to result in behavior change and measurable quality of healthcare improvements. In turn, this can result in greater diagnosis rates or higher rates of patient compliance.

SUMMARY

When pharmaceutical industry support is provided for quality CME programs in areas of overlap between business needs and unmet medical education needs, the industry can demonstrate a valuable compliant role for their support and counter internal and external criticism of their role. It can raise standards for CME, provide valuable needed education for healthcare providers, and improve patient care.

Benefits of pharmaceutical support can include:

- Meeting the company's mission to improve healthcare and patient well-being.
- Improving adherence to clinical practice guidelines and patient adherence, which could improve product efficacy and use.
- Providing greater understanding of new innovations which can speed their adoption and use in the field.
- Increasing disease detection and diagnosis rates, which can expand potential markets.
- Addressing local barriers to adoption which can increase product efficacy and use.

By promoting these benefits internally, directors of medical education departments can decrease the perceived risks of pharmaceutical involvement and create the perception of a winning proposition for industry, healthcare providers, and patients. ○

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