

BACKGROUND

The Institute of Integrative Nutrition (IIN) wishes to determine the viability of becoming a continuing education provider to complementary professional fields. They would thereby like to determine the scope, requirement and feasibility of becoming a supplier of continuing education units (CEU).

This overview will cover major professional groups, which include physicians, nurses and fitness professionals, that could benefit from continuing education in nutrition. The following objectives will be explored in this paper:

- Determine the administrative body that qualifies the CEUs providers by profession (vertical)
- Determine the number of units required and their frequency by profession (vertical)
- Determine the most common granting agencies or suppliers of CEUs by profession (vertical)
- Ascertain the number of participants that are enrolled in CEUs by professional function (vertical)
- Determine CEU requirements by (profession) vertical

The CEU is a measure of individual's participation in a formal continuing education program. As defined by the International Association for Continuing Education and Training, 1 CEU is equal to 10 contact hours of instruction in a continuing education activity. Any activity less than one hour in duration is not be eligible for CEU credit.

CEU records are widely used to provide evidence of completion of continuing education requirements mandated by certification bodies, professional societies or governmental licensing boards. The records also provide employers with information on training pertinent to particular occupations. CEUs are most commonly available through workshops, professional conferences, distance learning and the Internet.

The CEU is in the public domain, therefore use of the CEU is voluntary and no permission or approval is required. Any organization can offer the traditional CEU. There are many organizations that offer varying levels of quality and standards, which has led to credibility and value questions concerning the CEU.

Since this paper is exploring continuing education across a number of professions, the term "continuing education unit" will be used interchangeably with "continuing education credit" or, in the case of the medical field, "continuing medical education".

CEU ADMINISTRATOR

The International Association for Continuing Education and Training (IACET) is a non-profit association dedicated to the provision of quality continuing education and training programs. IACET authorizes education providers that meet strict continuing education criteria and guidelines which are the core of thousands of educational programs worldwide.

The Association is the administrator of the CEU for several types of organizations including non-profits, hospitals, associations and universities. Some IACET CEU providers worthy of mention are the National Medical Association, National League of Nurses and Ohio Academy of Holistic Health. IACET assumes responsibility for refining and disseminating information about the CEU. Through its programs, publications, research and technical assistance, the Association assists organizations in correctly utilizing the criteria.

One Continuing Education Unit (CEU) is defined as ten contact hours of participation in an organized continuing education experience under responsible sponsorship, capable direction and qualified instruction. A college, association, company or any other organization willing and able to meet each of the established criteria may award IACET CEU credits.

In order to provide IACET CEU's, an organization must determine the appropriate membership classifications from among the following:

[AQ: List missing.]

The authorized provider that has the right to utilize the IACET logo and issue IACET CEUs. There are also organizational, individual and a licensed standards user classifications (the latter classification allows organizations to use the IACET standards as the basis of their own).

IACET authorized providers (509 providers as of 2005) undergo strict evaluation by continuing education peers, which takes 4-6 months to complete. Authorized providers are also required to apply for reauthorized every five years. It is also important to note that IACET holds workshops for those interested in becoming an, which outline the CEU criteria and authorized provider application process. Only **[AQ: Is this incomplete or should it be deleted?]**

Fitness Professionals

As we move from a general CEU administrator to discipline specific administrator, lets begin with fitness professionals which includes all professionals who engage in group exercise or personal instruction.

Several organizations are recognized as CEU providers for fitness professionals, including two organizations that serve as both CEU administrators and grantors: The American Council on Exercise and the American College of Sports Medicine. Another organization worthy of mention is the Aerobics and Fitness Association of American. While they are not the only organizations providing CEUs, they are among the largest supporters of fitness professionals.

With approximately 45,000 members, **The American Council on Exercise (ACE)** has been committed to enriching quality of life through safe and effective physical activity since 1985. The nonprofit organization protects all segments of society against ineffective fitness products, programs and trends through its ongoing public education, outreach and research. ACE further protects the public by setting certification and continuing education standards for fitness professionals. More than 200,000 fitness professionals in the United States and 77 other countries have received certification through ACE.

Fitness professionals must stay current on the latest fitness principles and obtain 20 hours, or 2.0 continuing education credits (CEC), every two years (1 hr = .1 cec) to qualify for ACE recertification. ACE provides a variety of learning formats, including live workshops, online and distance learning courses, and self-learning tools such as DVDs.

To receive approved status, potential CEC providers must complete an application process and ensure that all instructors hold either a current ACE certification or a four-year degree (or higher) in exercise science or a related field (i.e., health, physical education, medical, athletic training, physical therapy, nutrition, etc).

The American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM) promotes and integrates scientific research, education and practical applications of sports medicine and exercise science to maintain and enhance physical performance, fitness, health and quality of life. As the largest sports medicine and exercise science organization in the world, ACSM has more than 20,000 international, national, and regional chapter members.

Of paramount importance to ACSM is the ability to offer continuing education opportunities to professionals in sports medicine and exercise science. The College hosts many of its own traditional conferences and regional chapter meetings and is developing more programs available through web access. In addition, ACSM endorses quality offerings from other organizations.

ACSM certified professionals must earn the required number of Continuing Education Credits (CECs), Continuing Medical Education (CMEs), Continuing Education Units (CEUs) and/or the equivalent based on specific certifications every three years. The chart below provides examples of the credits required for specific certifications.

Level of Certification	Credits
ACSM Program Director SM ACSM Health/Fitness Director [®]	90 credits
ACSM Exercise Specialist [®] ACSM Health/Fitness Instructor [®] ACSM Registered Clinical Exercise Physiologist [®]	60 credits
ACSM Certified Personal Trainer TM	45 credits
ACSM Exercise Test Technologist [®] ACSM Group Exercise Leader [®] ACSM Exercise Leader/Army	30 credits

Continuing education units are typically earned through participation in any of the following activities

- ACSM national meetings, regional chapter meetings, endorsed programs and self-tests
- Meetings sponsored by other professional health/fitness and clinical organizations
[AQ: Does this count as endorsed programs?]
- Clinic/Hospital grand rounds
- Academic teaching or professional lecturing (One CEC per hour. Only 30 percent of total credit hours can be obtained by these activities.)
- University/College courses (10 CECs per credit hour. Course must be health/fitness- or clinical-related and completed with a grade of "C" or better.)
- Publications (10 CECs for publication in peer-reviewed professional journals, books, or authorship or co-authorship of accepted abstracts)

The **Aerobics and Fitness Association of America (AFAA)** is one of the world's largest fitness and TeleFitness[®] educators. Since 1983, AFAA has issued over 200,000 certifications to fitness professionals from more than 73 countries around the world. AFAA provides a comprehensive written and practical examination accredited by Vital Research, has affiliate status with the National Board of Fitness Examiners (NBFEE), and is a member of the National Organization of Competency Assurance (NOCA).

The AFAA certification is valid for a period of two years. In order to maintain certification status AFAA requires a minimum of 15 continuing education units (CEUs) **[AQ: For whom?]** and 20 CEUs for those who are AFAA Fitness Practitioners. The following types of courses are approved for AFAA CEUs:

- AFAA workshops, home study courses and continuing education corner
- Approved courses offered by authorized AFAA Continuing Education Providers

- Courses approved for CECs by the American College of Sports Medicine
- Accredited college and university courses in the accepted subject areas

Home study, correspondence, Internet-based, distance learning or telephonic courses developed by other organizations are not acceptable. Generally speaking, each CEU method earns approximately five credits per type of instruction.

Educators such as workshop leaders and lecturers may provide continuing education units to AFAA certified instructors and personal trainers by becoming authorized continuing education providers. The basic qualifications include current AFAA certification and related teaching experience. In some cases, relevant licenses and/or degrees are considered. Courses offered by providers of AFAA CEUs must be directly related to the skills and knowledge necessary for fitness professionals.

Medical Professionals

The **Accrediting Council of Continuing Medical Education** (ACCME) identifies, develops and promotes the standards for quality continuing medical education (CME) used by physicians to maintain their competence in their field of specialty and to incorporate new knowledge to improve the quality of medical care for patients and their communities. ACCME accomplishes this through a self-regulated system for accrediting CME providers and a peer review process responsive to changes in medical education and the health care delivery system.

Only certain organizations are eligible to receive ACCME accreditation. The criteria below must be met before an organization will be considered for ACCME accreditation.

The organization must:

- be located in the United States and its Territories.
- be developing and/or presenting a program of CME for physicians on a regular and recurring basis.
- not be a commercial interest.
- not be developing and/or presenting a program of CME that is, in the judgment of the ACCME, devoted to advocacy on unscientific modalities of diagnosis or therapy.
- present activities that have “valid” content. Specifically, the organization must be presenting activities that promote recommendations, treatment or manners of practicing medicine that are within the definition of CME. Providers are not eligible for accreditation if they present activities that promote treatments that are known to have risks or dangers that outweigh the benefits or are known to be ineffective in the treatment of patients.

The ACCME accredits the following types of institutions:

- state medical societies,
- Liaison Committee for Medical Education (LCME)-accredited schools of medicine,
- national physician membership organizations
- national medical specialty societies and
- organizations whose programs of CME serve physician learners, 30 percent or more of whom are from **beyond** the home or contiguous state(s) of the organization.
- organizations whose programs of CME primarily serve physician learners, 70% or more of whom are **from** the home or contiguous state(s) of the organization, are usually accredited by an ACCME recognized state medical society.

Note that a CME provider may not maintain both ACCME accreditation and accreditation by a state medical society at the same time.. A similar process follows for ACCME accredited providers that become accredited by a state medical society. **[AQ: Does this mean that the state process is similar?]**

In addition to ensuring the quality of the CME, there are organizations that provide the CMEs necessary to fulfill and maintain physician certifications,. One such organization is the American Medical Association (AMA), the largest physician focused organization. With a membership of 244,000, the AMA works to partner with physicians in improving the nations health. One of the ways AMA accomplishes this is by sponsoring accredited CME courses that allow physicians to earn certification by attending live activities, journal-based learning, self-directed learning from video and audio materials, online education, and various other learning formats.

In order to better understand the requirements for fulfilling CME's specific to family practice, a valuable resource is the American Association of Family Practice (AAFP). The association exhorts that 57,000 family physicians need AAFP CME credit to maintain their AAFP membership. The CME is the cornerstone of the AAFP, serving as a requirement for continuing membership since the founding of the organization in 1947. Continuing medical education is emphasized because the family physician carries the responsibility for providing comprehensive and continuing health care to patients. This education process encompasses all the areas usually encountered by the family physician that are necessary to carry out these responsibilities

Active members and family physicians eligible for supporting membership must complete 150 credits approved CME (1 hour = 1 CME credit) every three years, of which a minimum of 25 must be obtained from group learning activities and a minimum of 75 must be prescribed credit. A prescribed CME credit has content directly related to patient care or its delivery or related to selected non-clinical topics, and has been planned and developed with input from an AAFP Active or Life Member. The remaining CMEs can include elective credits from an activity that has content of interest to physicians that is not necessarily related directly to patient care or its delivery but will improve a physician's professional ability. AAFP member input is not required for elective credit.

CME providers must comply with the **Accreditation Council for Continuing Medical Education** (ACCME) Standards for Commercial Support when requesting AAFP CME credit. The activity director must attest to compliance on the CME application, confirming the activity meets every requirement of the Standards.

Osteopathic physicians (D.O.) specializing in family practice are required to maintain certifications similar to requirements for family practice MDs. A minimum of 150 hours (1 hr = 1 CME credit) must be approved and documented by the **American Osteopathic Association** (AOA) within a three-year period, with at least one-third falling under category I or II. Category 1-A credits are granted to attendees for formal educational programs designed to enhance clinical competence and improve patient care. An AOA-accredited Category 1 CME provider must sponsor these programs. The remaining categories (1B to 2B) consist of varying types of learning formats, the most relevant being **non-Osteopathic CME Programs**. The Council on Continuing Medical Education may recognize all opathic specialty or subspecialty programs for Category 1-B credit when, in the Council's opinion, there are essentially no equivalent courses available within the osteopathic profession, and such recognition will apply to all physicians in that specialty or subspecialty. An ACCME accredited or AAFP approved provider must offer these courses.

The AOA is a member association representing more than 56,000 osteopathic physicians. It serves as the primary certifying body for D.O.s and as the accrediting agency for all osteopathic medical colleges and health care facilities.

Accreditation policy for osteopathic CME sponsors is established by the AOA Board of Trustees, and the board has delegated authority to the **Council on Continuing Medical Education** (CCME) to monitor osteopathic CME and to grant (or deny) Category 1 accreditation status to osteopathic CME sponsors. The CCME also has the authority to conduct accreditation document surveys and on-site surveys of CME sponsors.

Nursing

The final professional area explored for this report is nursing. Again, similar to physicians there is an overarching body, the American Nursing Credentialing Center. As the largest nursing credentialing organization in the United States, ANCC and has a long tradition of providing programs that establish respect for nurses and the profession. The ANCC certifies health providers and accredits educational providers, approvers and programs. Its mission being the promotion of excellence in nursing and health care globally, ANCC is also the credentialing arm of the American Nurses Association.

Certification renewal requires completion of any two categories, or the doubling any one category, within a five-year period. As of January 1, 2003, 50 percent of contact hours must be provided by an ANCC accredited or approved provider.

Renewal requires completion of 75 contact hours subject to the following conditions:

- Officially approved nursing continuing education credits may be used (e.g., seminars, workshops, conferences, and presentations that award CEUs).
- Nursing continuing education that is not officially approved may be used as long as the content is applicable to the professional's area of certification (e.g., in-services, workshops, study modules, grand rounds offered by your place of employment).
- Independent study that is approved for continuing education may be used for 100 percent of the contact hours required (e.g., home study programs, articles from journals, CME articles, other health discipline independent study modules).
- Other health disciplines' continuing education hours may be used if the content is applicable to the professional's area of certification (e.g., CME credits, social work, counselors, physical therapists).

At least 51 percent of the total continuing education credits must be in the professional's certification specialty and at least 50 percent of the total continuing education credits must be from any of the following organizations:

- an ANCC-accredited approved provider
- American Academy of Family Practitioners (AAFP)
- American Academy of Nurse Practitioners (AANP)
- American Academy of Physician Assistants (AAPA)
- American College of Nurse Midwives (ACNM)
- American Pharmaceutical Association (APhA)
- American Psychiatric Nurses Association (APNA)
- Emergency Nurses Association (ENA)
- Hospice and Palliative Nurses Association (HPNA)
- National Association of Nurse Practitioners in Women's Health (NPWH)
- National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners (NAPNAP)

In addition to continuing education provided by the organizations listed above, CEUs will also be accepted as part of the 50 percent requirement if provided by organizations accredited by the **Accreditation Council on Continuing Medical Education (ACCME)**:
Examples of contact hour equivalencies for nursing include:

- 1 CEU = 10 contact hours
- 1 contact hour = 0.1 CEU
- 1 contact hour = 50 minutes
- 1 academic semester hour = 15 contact hours
- 1 academic quarter hour = 12.5 contact hours
- 1 CME = 60 minutes or 1.2 contact hours
- 1 AMA credit = 1.2 contact hours or 60 minutes

There are several different ways to become recognized as a provider of continuing nursing education through ANCC. The first approach is applying to ANCC for **accredited** provider status, which includes an application process and requires a site visit. The second option is seeking **approved** provider status through a constituent member association (CMA) that is already accredited through ANCC. Most CMAs are state nurses associations (not to be confused with state licensing boards). The CMA approval is effective for three years. The third option is applying to an ANCC's approved provider for a two-years approval of a specific educational activity.

Organizations applying for ANCC accreditation are required to:

- be operational, using ANCC's Commission on Accreditation (COA) criteria for a minimum of six months.
- have planned, implemented, and evaluated at least three different education activities, reflecting compliance with ANCC COA criteria.
- have a registered nurse with a graduate degree in nursing or a related specialty who is responsible for planning, developing, implementing and evaluating the continuing nursing education activities. One degree--either baccalaureate or graduate--must be in nursing.

CONCLUSION

It is apparent that continuing education units are offered in a variety of environments and formats to meet the needs of the end user. It is will become increasingly important for providers to be nimble and flexible in their approaches to delivery. Specifically, in the last several years physicians have increasingly registered for online CMEs, making this venue the fastest growing format.

The increased interest reflects multiple factors. First, many doctors' schedules have become so crammed that getting away for a meeting can be nearly impossible. Online CMEs are also gaining popularity because doctors of all ages are increasingly comfortable with the Internet, though a large proportion comes from the most recent crop of Internet-savvy physicians. Other common users include physicians in remote areas for whom traveling to meetings can be both costly and time-prohibitive, and those in rare specialties that may not have as many live CME options.

Although, the online CME has made great strides, a number of experts agree that the human interactions in live sessions cannot be replicated online, however live education can significantly extend the reach of the original CME program if different formats are produced from the live presentation. The major challenge for online the CME will be its profitability.