

## What "Counts" as Continuing Education?

By Brian P. Hughes BCC

The Education Committee is seeking to clarify and help members understand the continuing education (CE) reporting requirements for maintenance of certification. In reviewing the Annual Summary of Continuing Education Hours forms submitted this year, we have realized that there is widespread confusion and mistaken assumptions regarding what "counts" and what "doesn't count" as CE. Please read this article carefully, even if you believe you have been doing Continuing Education properly, as we hope to clarify, simplify, and educate you on how to best comply with the requirements for Continuing Education.

An easy way to decide whether something counts as CE is to use the following question as an overall guide: **"How does this intentional education equip me for my role as a chaplain?"** As a general rule, if you find yourself having to rationalize or make an argument for why such-and-such entry should count, then it probably does *not* count as CE. We are requiring BCCs to submit Continuing Education that is clear, non-ambiguous and with little to no need of defense or detailed explanation.

When trying to ascertain what should and should not count, one of the best analogies would be a nurse, physician or social worker. If a nurse takes Spanish classes to better understand his patients, this is commendable, but the state in which this nurse works would not count this as formal continuing education for his nursing license. If a physician who manages five employees in her practice took a management course in how to best supervise these employees, this is commendable, but it would not be recognized by that doctor's national board as formal continuing education. If a social worker learns much from the Web-based mandatory education required annually of each hospital employee for HIPAA compliance, this social worker would never be allowed to submit those hours of learning as formal continuing education.

As certified chaplains seeking to advance our knowledge and expertise, we must ask ourselves:

- How is this learning intentional as opposed to incidental (in the course of one's routine work)?
- How is this learning better equipping me to be a professional chaplain?
- If someone from outside our profession were to look at my CE form, would that person be able to understand why this was included?

### What about Interdisciplinary (Patient Care) Rounds?

Board certified chaplains are trained in the CPE model of seeing the patient as a living document. We know that much can be learned professionally from interaction with colleagues discussing a patient's situation and discharge status, or even the chaplain's role, goals and plan for that patient. Such interdisciplinary rounds (i.e. interprofessional teams of colleagues discussing patient cases in order to communicate with one another about the patient's situation and progress) have been included by many of you on your past CE forms. However, this does *not* count as CE under our current guidelines. There is nothing intentional about interdisciplinary patient care as being educational. The chaplain is simply doing his or her job, not specifically seeking to expand his or her knowledge of chaplaincy. Grand rounds, on the other hand, are presentations, often via Power Point, of specific topics, cases or theories that are expressly for the practitioner of care to learn more about their profession. It may be on the bioethical principle of double effect, or how a specific population segment has unique needs and perceptions of the health care process. This kind of intentional learning would indeed "count" as CE, as would reading an article about religious coping in cancer patients.

### How Can I Afford Continuing Education?

The expense of trying to find 50 hours annually to fulfill these requirements is another important consideration. We recognize that these are difficult economic times. Some may not have employers who underwrite or reimburse continuing education, and others are somewhat professionally or geographically isolated and may not have many conferences related to chaplaincy accessible to them on a regular basis. As a result, APC has begun to offer low-cost Professional Chaplaincy Webinars throughout the year. In addition, we encourage members to read peer-reviewed articles and books related to their work, and count every hour included in those efforts. Between reading, service to APC, Webinars, grand rounds, writing/publishing, seminars, conferences and the like, there are indeed many possibilities for fulfilling your 50-hour CE requirement, including some at little or no cost to you.

Fifty hours is a standard that can be challenging for all of us, and obviously more so for some. Nonetheless, it seems to be an appropriate professional standard that the APC should maintain. Fortunately, for those who are in more removed locations, there are many ways to continue to receive continuing education. The APC website lists Continuing Education Opportunities, and invites any and all who are aware of upcoming events to submit them to be listed for your colleagues in your region using the Educational Opportunity Listing Application.

*Chaplain Brian P. Hughes BCC of Dallas, TX, is a stay-at-home dad. Previously, he was a staff chaplain at Thomas Jefferson University Hospital and Magee Rehabilitation Hospital in Philadelphia, PA. At the time of this writing, he served as the Education Committee chair and 2010 Conference Workshops Subcommittee chair. Questions regarding Continuing Education may be directed to the national office at [info@professionalchaplains.org](mailto:info@professionalchaplains.org).*