

# news THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS HEALTH SCIENCE CENTER AT DALLAS

southwestern medical school ■ graduate school of biomedical sciences ■ school of allied health sciences

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\*\*\*\*\*Back to school for doctors,  
nurses and health workers

DALLAS-- Some people may never finish school.

They include doctors, nurses and other health care professionals who now plan seriously to fulfill the axiom that education is a life-long process.

They're going back to school in increasing numbers--learning new techniques and approaches in the rapidly-moving fields of medical science and technology.

"There is a movement of physicians, consumers and state and federal regulatory agencies toward requiring continuing medical education on a life-long basis," says Dr. George Race. "This presumably will result in a faster and more thorough transfer of new research findings into improved patient care."

Dr. Race is associate dean for continuing education at The University of Texas Health Science Center at Dallas and dean of the A. Webb Roberts Center for Continuing Education at Baylor Medical Center in Dallas. The Roberts Center is the result of an arrangement between the two institutions to pool their resources to develop a full-time continuing education program in the health sciences.

Credits earned in continuing medical education (CME) are becoming increasingly valuable to health care professionals, Dr. Race says.

The American Medical Association offers an award to recognize physicians who participate regularly in CME. And the Texas State Nursing Association has established a system called Continuing Education Accredited Recognition Points to encourage nurses to pursue learning activities.

But more important to doctors than awards and recognition is the fact that at least 14 state medical associations now require their members to participate in approved CME programs. And at least eight states (not including Texas) have passed legislation to require CME as a basis for relicensure to practice medicine.

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first add continuing medical education

Likewise, this year the American Board of Family Practice will become the first medical specialty board to require periodic (every six years) mandatory recertification. Three hundred credit hours of CME, combined with a half-day written examination and a review of the physician's patient charts will serve as the basis for recertification.

Most of the other 21 medical specialties--surgery, radiology, etc.--presently have what is essentially lifetime certification, although all of them intend to provide recertification at some point in the future.

Dr. Race predicts that someday all doctors, nurses and allied health professionals will be periodically recertified and relicensed, partly on the basis of documented participation in continuing medical education.

According to Dr. Race, CME is also playing an important role in the medical malpractice crisis:

"The continuing education efforts by the practicing physician provide protection against an assertion in a malpractice suit that he is not fully prepared to do a professional job."

Soaring malpractice insurance costs will probably significantly increase the growth of CME programs in the next few years, he adds.

Dr. Race, an internationally recognized pathologist, has headed the Roberts Center since its beginning in 1973 and has seen it grow dramatically into one of the large programs of its kind in the nation.

"Since the center opened in 1973, the attendance for CME programs here has grown from about 400 per year to 16,000 per year," he says. "The doctors and other participants are very enthusiastic about our program and feel that the stimulus is well worth the time and effort."

"The center has become the clearinghouse for continuing education programs for the North Texas region.

"Various hospitals and professional societies write to us and ask, for example, for a review of cardiology (the branch of medicine dealing with the heart) and we set up a workshop that will cover their problems," he continues. "The physicians are able to choose those programs that best meet their individual learning needs."

The center brings to Dallas world authorities in the field of medicine and thus enables doctors in this region to gain valuable knowledge with minimal interruption of their work. The center's activities enhance the status of Dallas as a medical center and as a place for outstanding physicians to practice.

second add continuing medical education

The center is responsible for not only providing the programs, but also for being familiar with all of the procedures of accreditation for each specialty. Adequate records must be maintained of the participants, the instructors, and the sponsors for each activity.

"Certificates of attendance are given and records of an individual's continuing education activities are kept in a computer file," Dr. Race explains. "In the two and one-half years since this program began more than 20,000 individuals have earned credit by attending one or more of the programs."

Dr. Race concludes that in this era of consumerism and public accountability, physicians will be required to demonstrate their continued competence in some way. Continuing medical education appears to be part of the answer.

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