



Reality CE Your Guide to Which Way is Up!

Question

As a CME provider, I often struggle with identifying appropriate gaps and educational needs for the activities we certify. Are there any tips for developing a successful needs assessment?

Answer

Many accrediting organizations (see References) require providers to incorporate into CE activities the educational needs (knowledge, competence, performance) that underlie the professional practice gaps of their own learners. Whether you are an accredited provider or contributor to an educational activity, it is important to understand the difference between a gap in practice and an educational need. An educational gap is defined as the difference between a current (what is) and a desired or optimal state (what ought to be). Educational needs are the contributing factors that form gaps: the knowledge, skills and/or performance that must be remedied in order to help narrow a practice gap.

When identifying practice gaps and educational needs, there are several questions that providers should be asking themselves and the physicians they are targeting:

- What is the problem we are trying to address?
- Why does the problem exist?
- What do we want to change?
- How prevalent is the need among the target audience?

To assist with the identification of practice gaps and educational needs, there are many sources available to providers, including, but not limited to:

- Newspapers and local media

- Research literature
- National benchmarks/guidelines
- Surveys of health professionals
- National/regional/local/institutional data
 - Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, <http://www.ahrq.gov/data>
 - Statistics Canada, <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/start-debut-eng.html>
 - Centers for Disease Control, <http://www.cdc.gov/datastatistics>
 - Commonwealth Fund, <http://whynotthebest.org>
 - County Health Rankings & Roadmaps, <http://www.countyhealthrankings.org>
 - Kaiser Family Foundation, <http://www.kaiseredu.org> or <http://www.statehealthfacts.org>
 - Multi-sponsored, <http://www.thecommunityguide.org/index.html>
 - National Cancer Institute, <http://ratecalc.cancer.gov/ratecalc> or <http://www.cancer.gov/statistics/find>
 - The National Report Card on the State of Emergency Medicine, <http://www.emreportcard.org>
 - National Heart Lung and Blood Institute, <http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/prof/other/index.htm>
 - National Institute of Mental Health, <http://www.nimh.nih.gov/statistics/index.shtml>
 - Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, <http://www.rwjf.org/en/research-publications/data-center.html>

Tips for a Successful Needs Assessment/Gap Analysis

- Ensure that your gaps and needs are linked back to your learners. For example, if you are developing CE for the clinicians at your institution or in your learner network, utilize local or institutional data when planning your activity rather than national data that may not apply to your physicians.
- Provide adequate detail for your needs assessment. Ideally, you want to provide enough detail that it is easy to link the gap to the objectives and agenda, but you do not want to provide so much detail that it becomes difficult to easily identify the gap and need.
- Make sure that the objectives bridge the gap between the identified problem (gap/need) and the desired outcome. And make sure the agenda topics are linked to the objectives.

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References

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