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Tips for choosing CE courses. – Dental Hygienists

Managing the enormous amount of new dental industry information and integrating into our practices is a challenge. Here are some tips and pointers on selecting continuing education to meet your challenges.

1. Check with your state licensing board to determine the requirements for licensure. There is variability from state to state, with some states requiring mandatory (specific) CE training. For example, CPR re-certification, local anesthesia refresher, and infection control updates. These refresher topics are usually just a part of the overall CE requirement.
2. Determine how to meet your state's minimum requirement. Some states allow C.E. courses to be taken online or via a CE article in a journal with a certificate of completion. In my state presentation of a table clinic or lecture counts toward your CE requirement as does reading 10 hours of journals.
3. Don't get trapped into taking only the minimum number of CE due to state regulations. Be open to learning new information simply for your own intellectual stimulation and professional development. Many times I have been called asking if I am doing a three hour CE course as that is all they need to meet the state's requirement. My question: Why would you want the state to determine how much you can learn? The most satisfied practitioners are those that continue to set goals and challenges for self-improvement.
4. Caution should be taken in using only one method for CE. For instance – only Internet based courses or journal reading. Although the advantages of staying home to take CE are appealing, you may lose out on another important means of learning. Interacting with other hygienists and dental team members during a live presentation provides for enhanced learning. Discussing the lecture during breaks and lunch hours can be a valuable tool to retain information and allow for exchange of office implementation strategies.
5. Who pays for CE? In my experience of lecturing and coordination of CE courses, I have discovered that great variation occurs in payment for CE. Usually 50-75% of the participants have their tuition paid by the employer if they are full time employees. Progressive offices understand that well trained employees are assets to their practices and are well worth the investment. Attending a CE course together as a team maximizes the benefits as all are hearing the same presentation and have opportunities to collaborate on implementation.

6. If you are a part time employee or on a sabbatical from practice, the investment in your development often becomes your responsibility. Economic factors combined with self-assessment of your skills will help you determine the best means for selecting CE courses that meet your individual learning needs and personal goals.
7. I suggest a self-evaluation of your skills at the end of each year. With the plethora of new products introduced to the dental industry each year, it is critical that hygienists stay well informed. Patients have many choices and are bombarded by commercials in the general media on oral health care products. Yet they expect you to be the expert in guiding them to the best products using evidence based approaches.
8. When interviewing for a new position, ask questions about office policy regarding CE and what benefits the employer offers. If you are employed in an office that does not offer CE as an employee benefit, you might consider a discussion with your employer. Make a list of benefits to the employer for you to attend a CE course. Persuade the employer that you can enhance the practice by attendance of a specific CE course. Employers are always seeking to improve their profits. CE courses provide an expense that is a tax benefit for the employer. You could demonstrate how you could increase profitability and/or production by learning new techniques. Always view the proposal from the employer' s gain- not yours.
9. Finally – consider sharing your expertise in the form of a table clinic presentation, guest speaker for your local component, study club, or dental hygiene program in your area. Presenting your expertise provides even more benefits to the practice as you are also representing your practice. What a great marketing tool for your office! Many specialty offices offer CE courses to their referring offices. Experienced hygienists have a plethora of expertise to present to others. As a CE speaker I gain valuable insights from my audience to enhance my next presentation. It is a great way to learn – collaboration. We all have something to contribute.