

## **Important Updates Regarding Revisions to the AST Continuing Education Policies**

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Every five years, AST completes a comprehensive review of the continuing education (CE) policies that includes a review of the current CE literature to ensure the policies reflect presently-accepted CE methodologies. The following is presented in two sections: the first section will examine the revisions made to the CE policies for the CST and CFA, and the second section will review the new program approval policies. The revised and new policies will go into **effect January 1, 2010**.

### **AST CE Policies for the CST and CFA**

The revised title that places more focus on the professions is “AST CE Policies for the CST and CFA.” This leads into the introductory material that is presented in an improved format and includes new statements such as the AST Continuing Education Mission statement, which supports AST’s mission statement: “To enhance the profession to ensure quality patient care,” and continuing education definition and goals. Enduring materials is a term that has long been used in the continuing education industry. While it has not been consistently used by AST in the past, it is now included and defined in the policies. Enduring materials are defined as non-live CE offerings that include CE articles made available by hard copy or electronically, or viewing a recorded CE lecture made available electronically.

AST recently hosted a meeting that included representatives of the AST Education & Professional Standards Committee, Accreditation Review Committee on Education in Surgical Technology & Surgical Assisting (ARC/STSA), and the National Board of Surgical Technology & Surgical Assisting (NBSTSA) to discuss current and future trends in continuing education and receive feedback concerning the CE policies. The discussions provided valuable guidance, and the revision of the CE policies reflects the ideas and suggestions that were shared at the meeting. One particular concept that was discussed in-depth concerned the statement from the CE policies, “Activities in which CE credits are earned must be relevant to the practice of surgical technology.” In the past, this statement applied; however, the surgical technology and surgical assisting professions are experiencing a positive growth trend in that CSTs and CFAs are performing roles and duties that previously were not widely performed. For example, CSTs are working as infection control officers, supervisors of central sterile supply departments, educators, labor and delivery, which includes expanded patient-care duties such as fetal monitoring, and working in pain management clinics. It only makes sense that CSTs and CFAs complete continuing education to maintain their continued competence in the areas in which they are employed. Therefore, the statement has been revised to better represent the expanded roles and duties of the CST and CFA. It now reads as follows

(bolding added for emphasis): Activities in which CE credits are earned must be relevant to the **medical-surgical practice** of surgical technology and surgical assisting. Another important addition has been made regarding the acceptance of partial CE credits. AST maintains the following equation when calculating CE credits: 50-60 minutes of lecture or activity equals 1 CE credit. Alternatively, if completing an independent study CE article, 2,000 type-written words equals 1 CE credit. However, a new policy has been added in that live or recorded lectures, including employer-sponsored in-services that are 30 minutes in length will be accepted for 0.5 CE credit. The lecture or in-service **must** last a minimum of 30 minutes. The existing policy of accepting partial CE credits in 15-minute increments remains in place past the required minimum of 30 minutes. For example, a lecture that lasts 45 minutes will be awarded 0.75 CE credits, or a lecture that lasts one hour and 15 minutes will be awarded 1.25 CE credits.

In addition to the acceptance of partial CE credits, another new policy addresses combining lectures. When possible, the lectures provided at CE programs will be combined in order to award the maximum number of CE credits, as long as the lectures are subject related. For example, an orthopedic seminar offers several lectures on total joint arthroplasty that are 15 minutes in length; the lectures will be combined to determine the total number of CE credits that will be accepted by AST. However, if a program has several lectures that cover various surgical specialties, the lectures are required to be at least 30 minutes in length and would not be eligible to be combined.

One last item to be addressed concerns a CE policy that has been in place for a long time, but continues to be the number one CE-related question AST receives – does AST accept employer-sponsored in-services? And the resounding answer is: Yes, AST has always accepted employer-sponsored in-services for CE credit. Employer-sponsored in-service is defined as those in-services developed and offered by the employer at no cost to the employee. The employer/health care facility is **not** required to complete an AST approval process for the in-services. AST recognizes that employer-sponsored in-services are a primary route for earning CE credits by the CST and CFA, and the health care facility is experienced in developing in-services that are relevant to the medical-surgical practice of the CST and CFA. However, this policy does not apply to third-party providers of CE activities that are delivered to a health care facility, most often through the Internet. Many health care facilities contract with a third-party provider of CE that is provided on the Internet. In this instance, the third-party provider would need to gain AST approval of their CE offerings.

### **Review of AST Program Approval Policies**

Since January 1, 2005, the AST Approved Provider Policies have been in effect. Organizations and businesses, including AST State Assemblies, are required to be an approved provider in order to offer CE credits to the CST and CFA. Due to the increasing complexities of CE, including the proliferation of Internet CE offerings, AST is replacing

the Approved Provider Policies with the “AST Policies for Program & Enduring Materials Approval.” These policies will go into effect January 1, 2010.

Corporate businesses, nonprofit organizations and AST State Assemblies who wish to offer CE credits to the CST and CFA will be required to complete the program application and submit it to AST for review. For the purposes of this article, the following information is focused on State Assemblies, however, it should be noted that the policies and program applications for all three entities are the same. The primary goal of the application is keep it simple, to the point and only ask for the information that is necessary in order for AST to make an informed approval decision. Additionally, the application represents a consolidation of the program forms that are currently on the AST Web site, including the date request form, post-program report, speaker profile packet, attendance record and attendee program evaluation. State Assemblies can still contact AST and request the packet of Certificates of Attendance.

When a State Assembly is planning a meeting or workshop in which CE lectures will be a part of the program agenda, the application package must be submitted to AST at least 120 days prior to the date(s) of the program. The application will be reviewed by AST, and if the CE program is determined to be relevant to the medical-surgical practice of surgical technology and surgical assisting, a letter of approval will be sent to the State Assembly. Incomplete application packages will delay the approval, therefore, it is important to submit all requested information with the application. Additionally, the State Assembly should choose the dates of the program carefully. State Assembly events that are scheduled within two weeks before or after an AST program, such as the Annual National Conference, will be contacted to choose another date. The policies and application will be posted beginning January 1, 2010, on the AST Web site. Completed applications should be sent to the attention of the AST CE Department. The CE Department and Member Services Department are available to assist by answering any questions you may have while completing the application.