

ARBO ANNOUNCES PLAN FOR “NEW STANDARDS FOR COMMERCIAL SUPPORT OF COPE APPROVED CONTINUING EDUCATION”.

Standards To Ensure Independence of COPE Approved Continuing Education.

Atlanta, GA (February 29, 2008) – The Association of Regulatory Boards of Optometry (ARBO) has developed new standards for commercial support of COPE approved continuing education. These standards, currently in draft form, will supplement the existing guidelines for COPE approved administrators and speakers plus add requirements to manage corporate support of COPE approved CE with the highest integrity and free of commercial bias. The announcement was made during a press conference at SECO 2008 in Atlanta.

These standards will benefit the relationship between industry and optometric continuing education and will give clear direction to both providers and industry. By ensuring compliance with these standards, industry is protected, optometric CE integrity is protected, the profession benefits from subsidized education, plus, the public is protected and benefits from improved quality of care.

Following this announcement, there will be a period for appropriate comment and suggestion from stakeholders in the CE system. Final guidelines will be released during the AOA Congress in Seattle, June 2008, with formal implementation anticipated to be required on January 1, 2009. This initial implementation period will entail a “grace period” of six months to allow integration of the standards by all stakeholders. Oversight and enforcement during this period will consist of notification of non-compliance and assistance with compliance issues. Full compliance will be required by July 1, 2009.

ARBO President, Christina Sorenson, O.D., stated, “Our commitment is to continue to provide salient and unbiased CE that is not influenced by a specific company, product or brand. Our responsibility is to provide and implement the standards necessary for establishing and protecting the integrity of optometric CE.”

The following is a summary of the “Standards for Commercial Support for Instructors”:

1. Lecturer must submit a course, not a company. An Administrator can submit a course but the Lecturer must sign.
2. Lecturer must be paid by the Administrator, not the supporting company.
3. Lecturer should not seek COPE approval if the presentation is for the purpose of promoting products, instruments or devices.
4. Lecturer will include a disclosure slide during their presentation that includes and addresses the following regarding the presentation of their course:
 - Their independence in preparing the course material and information.
 - Resolution of personal conflicts of interest.
 - Appropriate use of commercial support.

- Appropriate management of associated commercial promotion.
- Content and format without commercial bias.
- Disclosures relevant to potential commercial bias.

In order for continuing education event to be COPE approved, support must be in the form of an “Unrestricted Educational Grant”. In other words, support must be in the form of financial support only. This support will require a signed COPE “Supported CE Event Agreement” between the supporting company and the COPE Qualified Administrator. In addition, no one other than the COPE Qualified Administrator can sign this document. All points in this agreement must be addressed and all must be agreed upon to maintain COPE Qualified Administrator Status.

The following Points of Agreement Are Intended to Resolve Conflicts of Interest Between the Administrators and Supporting Companies:

1. To Abide by Principles inherent in COPE Standards for Commercial Support.
2. Supporting companies will not have control over selection of speakers.
3. Supporting companies will not have control over scientific content in courses.
4. To maintain control of promotional exhibits and materials.
5. Assure that courses are free of commercial bias.
6. Assure that the Administrator maintains overall control of all aspects of the program.
7. Assure that speakers disclose to the learners prior to presentation of off-label or experimental information.
8. To acknowledge the Purpose of the Company’s Educational Grants

On-Site Review Provides a System For Compliance:

The new guidelines will be monitored for compliance through the On-Site Review (OSR) system which is being proactively expanded. COPE’s objective for the OSR is not to impose penalties but to encourage and assist in compliance with a means of review that is uniform and fair.

The lecture being reviewed must occur at a COPE qualified event. The OSR will be conducted by certified and experienced COPE Reviewers who will provide their service on a voluntary basis which will help ensure an objective and unbiased process. There are currently over 100 COPE Reviewers, however, ARBO is currently working on expanding this base.

Each OSR will implement the following procedures:

1. A password protected website allows certified Reviewers to download the application and outline of a lecture along with checklists for both the event administration and course presentation.
2. These original documents assist the Reviewer in determining that the lecture being presented is not substantially different from the course originally submitted and is free of commercial bias.
3. The Reviewer will complete a checklist that examines compliance with the published guidelines.
4. Separate checklists are completed for lecturers and administrators.
5. After completion, the checklist is then submitted to COPE.

The press conference was concluded with a “Call for Comment” issued to all stakeholders in the optometric continuing education system. All suggestions should be submitted to ARBO in written form to the following address.

For further information, contact: ARBO at (314) 785-6000, FAX (314) 785-6002; E-mail at arbo@arbo.org or visit our web site at www.arbo.org.

The Association of Regulatory Boards of Optometry (ARBO) represents and assists member-licensing agencies in regulating the practice of optometry for the public welfare. ARBO's executive office is located at 1750 South Brentwood Boulevard, Suite 503, St. Louis, Missouri 63144.

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