

From this point on, the physician is in large part left to his own devices to maintain and update his fund of knowledge. He can maintain his university contacts by joining a clinical teaching faculty, an excellent approach to staying abreast of advancing medical knowledge, but an opportunity usually available only to board-certified specialists in cities with medical schools. He can also seek out any of a number of short courses sponsored by specialty societies and conducted in medical institutions. He can also read the medical literature, attend medical meetings, and take advantage of a variety of audiovisual presentations, either in the privacy of his car, home, or office, or in staff meetings at his local hospital.

In recent years, several States and specialty societies have recognized the physician's need for continuing education to keep his medical knowledge current and have attempted to encourage greater efforts at self-education. These States and societies have imposed on the physician requirements for a specified number of credit hours, usually 150 in 3 years, to qualify for license renewal or recertification. The American Medical Association grants a physician's recognition award to physicians completing 150 hours of continuing education in 3 years.

There are aspects of continuing education for physicians that are unique. While other professionals must also maintain their skills and be aware of new developments, as the tax lawyer must be aware of changes in the tax code, there is no field I can think of in which keeping up is so closely related to learning about new products or new uses of old products. Certainly, there is other information necessary also—knowledge of newer diagnostic techniques and new insight into disease mechanisms—but a significant portion of what an up-to-the-minute doctor needs to learn about is related to advances in therapeutics, especially drugs and medical devices.

Senator NELSON. May I go back to your statement on the bottom of page 3, top of page 4, in which you say that:

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How many States have licensing on relicensing requirements? Do you have those figures?

Dr. CROUT. I don't think we have those precise figures. It is on the order of a third or something, or it is less. I am sorry. I am told it is less than that.

Senator NELSON. Less than a third?

Dr. CROUT. It is an increasing number.

Senator NELSON. Do you have the statistics at the FDA?

Dr. CROUT. We do not at the FDA.

Senator NELSON. And then you refer to recertification. I assume that includes the professional societies and the various disciplines?

Dr. CROUT. Yes, or to maintain membership in these societies, for example in the American Academy of Family Physicians, is a requirement of that type.