

14068 COMPETITIVE PROBLEMS IN THE DRUG INDUSTRY

requirements for a specified number of credit hours, usually 150 in three 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 three 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 (e.g., 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--e.g., 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.

To understand the importance of post-graduate education to the physician's use of drugs, one must appreciate how rapidly information on drugs changes. Ninety percent of prescriptions written today are for drugs which were not even on the market a generation ago. New information about the uses and potential adverse effects of drugs appears almost continuously. Since the professional career of the average physician spans thirty to forty years, it is evident that most of what he learns about new drugs occurs after he completes his formal medical training.