

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### **1. When am I required to have continuing medical education to renew my license?**

The two year period during which you must OBTAIN the 50 hours of required continuing medical education began when you renewed your license on or after January 2011, and the REPORTING of your CME compliance will be on your renewal on or after January 2013.

For example, if you are required to renew your license in March 2013, you will be required to complete 50 hours of continuing medical education during the renewal cycle from March 2011 to March 2013. However, if you maintain certification through the NCCPA, then you would satisfy this requirement.

### **2. I have national certification through the NCCPA. Will this meet the continuing medical education requirements?**

Yes. Section 1399.615 (b) states that certification by the NCCPA will meet the Board's continuing medical education requirements.

Alternately, if you are not to be certified by the NCCPA, you will meet the requirements by completing 50 hours of approved continuing medical education during each two year period prior to renewal.

### **3. Am I required to maintain certification from the NCCPA?**

No. California does not currently require that you maintain national certification for renewal of your physician assistant license. However, the new continuing medical education requirements of 50 continuing medical education for each renewal cycle allows licensees who maintain certification from NCCPA during the renewal cycle to use that certification to satisfy this requirement.

### **4. What if I was certified previously (at the time I became licensed) but am not certified now?**

If you were now certified during the previous two year renewal period you would need to complete at least 50 continuing medical education hours during that time to satisfy the requirement for continuing education.

### **5. How do I report my continuing medical education compliance to the Board?**

Beginning January 2013, the renewal notice will contain a CME compliance box, and you will certify whether you meet the requirements. You will have to provide a "yes" or "no" answer.

**6. Will I need to submit any documentation when I renew to indicate I have met the continuing medical education requirements?**

No. You will simply answer the question on your renewal application under penalty of perjury. Pursuant to Regulation Section 1399.617, the Board may audit a random sample of licensees who report compliance with the continuing medical education requirement. If you are selected for an audit, you will be required to provide proof of compliance. However, if you are nationally certified by the NCCPA at the time of your renewal, you need not provide such records if the Board obtains verification from the NCCPA that the certification was valid at the time of renewal.

Pursuant to Section 1399.617, it is considered unprofessional conduct for any physician assistant to misrepresent his or her compliance with the continuing medical education requirements. In addition, if a physician assistant is found not to have completed the required number of hours of approved continuing medical education, or did not hold a valid certification from the NCCPA at the time of renewal, the physician assistant will be required to make up any deficiency during the next biennial renewal period. Failure to make up the deficient hours during the following renewal period means that the physician assistant will be ineligible for renewal of his or her license until the deficiency is remedied and proof thereof is submitted to the Board.

**7. Should I send continuing medical education documentation with my license renewal notice?**

No. Unless audited, it is only necessary to sign the certification on the renewal form and return it with the renewal payment.

**8. Should I retain records issued by an approved continuing medical education provider?**

Yes. A physician assistant must retain the records for a period of four years after the acquisition of the necessary continuing medical education. The records will be issued by the provider, and should indicate the title of the course or program, dates of attendance and hours assigned to the course. If the physician assistant is certified by the NCCPA at the time of renewal, evidence of NCCPA certification shall be retained for four years after certification is issued.

**9. If I am audited, do I have to show proof of attendance at continuing medical education courses or programs?**

Yes.

If you are **not** certified by the NCCPA, you **will** need to show proof of compliance with the continuing medical education requirements if audited. Acceptable documents include: Certificates of completion of continuing medical education events that name the

physician assistant as the participant; name and date(s) of the course or program, the number of approved Category 1 hours or prescribed credit hours granted.

If you are certified by the NCCPA, you will only need to show proof of the validity of your certification through the NCCPA and that your certification was valid at the time of renewal.

**10. I have a California license, but I am currently in the military. Can I be exempt from continuing medical education?**

The law requires that every physician assistant comply with the continuing medical education requirement. However, if a physician assistant is prohibited from participating in continuing medical education, an exemption may be considered on a case-by-case basis. You may submit a request to waive the continuing medical education requirements to the Board. The waiver form can be found on the website [www.pac.ca.gov](http://www.pac.ca.gov) under forms and publications, or you may contact the Board at 916.561.8780 to request a form.

**11. What happens if I am unable to comply with the continuing medical education requirements?**

You may request to renew in inactive status. A licensee who is inactive may not engage in any activity for which a physician assistant license is required. In order to be eligible for inactive status, your license must not be suspended, revoked or punitively restricted by the Board.

You may seek a waiver of the continuing medical education requirements if you cannot meet the requirements due to health, military service or undue hardship.

**12. I received a waiver for my last renewal period. How many hours do I need to complete by my next renewal?**

If a waiver is granted for a renewal period no continuing medical education hours or NCCPA certification is required. For the next renewal period, you must accumulate 50 hours of continuing medical education or be NCCPA certified at the time of renewal.

**13. Can I obtain an extension if I am unable to complete the 50 continuing medical education hours needed for renewal?**

No, the Board does not issue an extension. However, until the continuing education is completed, a license may be renewed in inactive status by payment of the renewal fee and by checking the inactive box on the renewal notice. A physician assistant cannot practice in California with an inactive license.

**14. I am renewing my license, but I am not working as a physician assistant at the present time. Should I check the "inactive" box on the renewal application?**

If the continuing education requirement has been met, a licensee may renew in an active status regardless of employment status. An inactive license means that the fees have been paid, but the licensee may not perform medical services. Practice as a physician assistant in California is not permitted with an inactive license.

### **15. How do I change my license status from inactive to active?**

To restore an inactive license to active status you must:

- Pay the renewal fee and delinquency fee, if applicable.
- You must complete continuing medical education equivalent to that required for a single renewal period of an active license within the last two years prior to applying to restore the license to active status.
- You may comply with the continuing medical education requirements by maintaining your certification by the NCCPA.
- Activating your inactive status license does not extend the expiration date of your license. The same expiration date will apply.

### **16. What if I cannot afford the cost involved in taking CME courses?**

Some hospitals have lunch meetings that are approved for Category 1 credit and offered to hospital personnel. Physician assistants wishing to locate Category 1 courses may call the California Academy of Physician Assistants (CAPA) at (714) 427.0321 or [capa@capanet.org](mailto:capa@capanet.org).

### **17. What happens if I am audited and cannot show proof or evidence of attendance at continuing medical education programs?**

A physician assistant deficient in continuing medical education hours must provide proof of CME during the next renewal cycle. However, the Board will not renew the license until all the required hours have been verified by the Board.

Your license status may be changed to inactive until you provide proof of CME compliance to the board. If this happens, you would not be able to engage in an activity for which a license is required.

Furthermore, a physician assistant may be charged with “unprofessional conduct” for misrepresenting compliance with the requirements during the license renewal process, for which a physician assistant license may be disciplined.

### **18. What are approved Continuing Medical Education Programs?**

Title 16 Code of Regulations Section 1399.616 explains who may provide continuing medical education. CME is valid if it is designated as Category 1 by the sponsors enumerated in Section 1399.616:

- (1) American Academy of Physician Assistants (AAPA).
  - (2) American Medical Association (AMA).
  - (3) American Osteopathic Association Council on Continuing Medical Education (AOACCME).
  - (4) American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP).
  - (5) Accreditation Council for Continuing Medical Education (ACCME).
  - (6) A state medical society recognized by the ACCME.
- (b) Continuing medical education obtained from a program other than those specified in subdivision (a) shall not satisfy the continuing education requirement in subdivision (a) of section 1399.615.