

## Evolution of continuing education programmes in Europe

Dear Sir,

Continuing Dental Education (CDE) is the fundamental ethical and professional obligation of every practicing dentist. It is the responsibility of each practitioner to improve his/her professional knowledge and clinical skills by participating in an appropriate and officially recognised Continuing Education Programme (CEP)<sup>1</sup>. There is a trend in most European countries that understand the importance of such knowledge update but who do not believe that the majority of practitioners will join courses voluntarily<sup>2</sup>.

In recent years many problems have been raised concerning CDE; should it be compulsory or voluntary? Is there an evaluation system in order to achieve a correct appreciation? Should we have sanctions for the practitioner who does not participate? and is there be some kind of equivalency agreement between countries?<sup>3,4</sup>.

In 2004, The ERO-FDI Education Working Group ran a survey in 38 European countries (34 responses) that gave the first overview of the problem, followed by a further survey in 2010<sup>5</sup> to 43 countries (37 responses). Both surveys used the same questions. CEP was mandatory in 21 countries (56%) and voluntary in 16 countries but the range of hours required was large (10–80 hours)<sup>6</sup>. Evaluation systems exist in 10 countries (27%) but in 16 countries (49%) none was reported (43% gave no response to this). Eleven of the countries have sanctions against dentists who do not fulfil CEP but 16 countries did not consider these issues. In a large majority of countries, the CEP was developed by an association or institution, usually after cooperation of the profession, a university and a health authority. In only eight countries was an equivalency a possibility, although 95% of countries expressed positive interest in such a possibility.

In terms of evolution of CEP in Europe, the trend is towards mandatory CEP<sup>7</sup>. Also in the majority of

cases the responsibility for the programmes is by authorities such as universities, the government health services and professional associations. Evaluation is now gaining popularity with it appearing in 27% of countries while sanctions against a practitioner not fulfilling their obligations is now discussed and introduced in 29% of countries. With the reunification and integration of the majority of the European countries the problem of the equivalency is most acute. There is a strong willingness to set up an equivalency system between the different CEPs. In several cases the number of unanswered questions is very important, perhaps this shows that national dental associations are hesitating to take a clear position about these issues.

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