

Understanding the AMA PRA Credit System

The AMA PRA Credit System

Issue

Many physicians are unfamiliar with the AMA Physician Recognition Award (PRA) Credit System including the various ways they can earn *AMA PRA Category 1 Credit™*, how they obtain that credit, and whether it is automatically reported to licensing and credentialing bodies.

Background

Formation of the AMA PRA Credit System

In 1968, the AMA House of Delegates established the PRA to encourage physicians to participate in continuing medical education (CME) after completing their training. The credit system was developed to identify what qualified for the award; this is where the name AMA PRA Credit System originates. Physicians can apply for the PRA if they meet certain requirements.

Accreditation of CME Providers

The AMA initially approved CME providers, but in 1981 formed the Accreditation Council for Continuing Medical Education (ACCME) with six other organizations. It is now the ACCME (or a state medical society that has been through a recognition process with the ACCME) that accredits organizations as CME providers. Accredited CME providers certify activities for *AMA PRA Category 1 Credit™* and are responsible for making sure the activities meet all requirements of both the AMA and the ACCME. The AMA participates in the accreditation process and is one of over 1,500 organizations accredited as CME providers through the ACCME system.

The Credit System and AMA's Role in CME

Dual Role

The AMA has two roles related to CME: it owns the AMA PRA Credit System and is accredited as a CME provider by the ACCME. Those are separate functions and operate independently. The rules of the credit system are established by the AMA Council on Medical Education; staff who work with the credit system itself are housed in the AMA's Medical Education Department. The AMA's CME provider functions are housed within the AMA's Education Center.

Credit Categories

AMA PRA Category 1 Credit™

- Physicians can be awarded credit by an accredited CME provider following their participation in the CME provider's educational activities. These activities are reported to the ACCME, and in some cases,

information about physician participation in those activities is transmitted to licensing and specialty certification boards.

- AMA learning formats certified for *AMA PRA Category 1 Credit™* by accredited CME providers include:
 - Live activities
 - Enduring materials
 - Journal-based CME
 - Test-item writing
 - Manuscript review
 - Performance Improvement CME
 - Internet point-of-care
 - Other activities
- There are also activities where the AMA awards credit to physicians directly as the owner of the credit system. **These activities are not reported to the ACCME, and there is no pathway for that information to be transmitted to licensing and certification boards; physicians are responsible for reporting their own information.**
 - Direct credit – These are activities that do not occur under the auspices of an accredited CME provider, but that the Council on Medical Education recognizes that learning occurs in completing these activities.
 - Preparing and presenting original content at a live CME activity (if credit is not awarded by the accredited CME provider)
 - Publishing, as the first or last listed author, a peer-reviewed article in a journal included in PubMed/MEDLINE
 - Preparing a poster presentation, as the first author, which is included in the published abstracts of an activity certified for *AMA PRA Category 1 Credit™*
 - Obtaining a medically related advanced degree, such as a master's in public health
 - Successfully completing an (American Board of Medical Specialties) ABMS member board certification, maintenance of certification, or focused practice designation
 - Successfully participating in an Accreditation Council for Continuing Medical Education accredited residency or fellowship program
 - International Agreements – the AMA has agreements with credit systems in other countries; physicians who participate in activities covered by the agreements can convert that credit to *AMA PRA Category 1 Credit™* through an application to the AMA. The AMA currently has agreements with the following organizations:
 - European Union of Medical Specialists
 - Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada
 - Department of Health Care Professions-Accreditation System, Ministry of Public Health-Qatar
 - European Board for Accreditation of Continuing Education for Health Professionals
 - International Conference Recognition Program – Established by the AMA House of Delegates in 1990, international conferences can apply to the AMA for recognition, and physicians are awarded *AMA PRA Category 1 Credit™* by the AMA for participation in approved conferences.

AMA PRA Category 2 Credit™

- Self-designated and claimed by individual physicians for participation in activities not certified for *AMA PRA Category 1 Credit™* but that meet the requirements below. Physicians do not get certificates for *AMA PRA Category 2 Credit™* since it is entirely self-documented. Some entities that require physicians to obtain CME credit do not accept *AMA PRA Category 2 Credit™*, but there are entities that will accept it to meet at least a portion of the CME requirement.
 - To claim *AMA PRA Category 2 Credit™*, the activities must:
 - Comply with the AMA definition of CME; and
 - Comply with the relevant AMA ethical opinions; and
 - Not be promotional; and
 - Be a worthwhile learning experience for a physician related to their practice
 - Examples of learning activities that might meet the requirements include, but are not limited to:
 - Participation in activities that have not been certified for *AMA PRA Category 1 Credit™*
 - Teaching physicians, residents, medical students or other health professionals
 - Unstructured online searching and learning (i.e., not internet point-of-care)
 - Reading authoritative medical literature
 - Consultation with peers and medical experts
 - Small group discussions
 - Self-assessment activities
 - Medical writing
 - Preceptorship participation
 - Research
 - Peer review and quality assurance participation

AMA PRA Booklet

Current booklet

In 2017, after a simplification and alignment process with the ACCME, the AMA published the most recent edition of the AMA PRA booklet with information for physicians and accredited CME providers. Requirements for CME providers were updated at that time.

Updates to the credit system since the 2017 booklet

The following are updates to the AMA PRA credit system, although they have not yet been incorporated into the booklet.

- The AMA Council on Medical Education added “last-listed author” to those who can claim *AMA PRA Category 1 Credit™* for the publication of a peer-reviewed article in a journal included in PubMed/MEDLINE.
- Some ABMS member-boards have worked with the AMA to transition credit for the maintenance of certification (MOC) secure exam into credit for MOC obtained through

- continuous certification assessments (not eligible if the assessment is certified as a CME activity).
- The AMA Council on Medical Education approved awarding *AMA PRA Category 1 Credit™* for an ABMS member-board Focused Practice Designation.
- The AMA House of Delegates approved increasing the credit for preparing a presentation at a live *AMA PRA Category 1 Credit™* activity from a 2:1 ratio to 4:1 for each hour of presentation time.

Potential Strategies

- Amplify awareness of the AMA PRA credit system among CME providers
- Provide training to CME providers and physician learners on updates to the credit system
- Encourage state medical societies to promote the AMA PRA booklet on their websites

Moving Forward

The AMA has many policies that address the AMA PRA credit system. For example, the AMA:

- Supports and promotes the AMA Physician's Recognition Award (PRA) Credit system as one of the three major CME credit systems that comprise the foundation for continuing medical education in the U.S., including the Performance Improvement CME (PICME) format, and continue to develop relationships and agreements that may lead to standards accepted by all U.S. licensing boards, specialty boards, hospital credentialing bodies, and other entities requiring evidence of physician CME as part of the process for MOL ([H-275.917](#))
- Allows physicians to claim an amount of Category 1 CME credits that accurately reflects the learning associated with preparing and presenting CME programs. Physicians may claim up to four (4) Category 1 CME hours per each hour of presentation ([D-300.975](#))
- Will continue cooperative efforts to assure that accredited sponsors of continuing medical education adhere to AMA Physician's Recognition Award (PRA) policy when designating AMA PRA credit ([D-300.999](#))
- Encourages state licensing boards with CME reporting requirements to allow AMA PRA Category 1 Credit™ and AMA PRA Category 2 Credit™ toward reregistration of the license to practice medicine; and all state licensing boards be urged to accept a current and valid AMA Physician's Recognition Award as evidence of completion of these requirements ([H-300.955](#))

Resources

- [2017 AMA PRA booklet](#)
- [Claim direct credit](#) for activities for which credit is awarded by the AMA as the owner of the credit system
- [Summary table](#) of state CME requirements on the website of the Federation of State Medical Boards