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Guidelines and Best Practices – Developing a Compliant Needs Assessment

A needs assessment is the foundation of any CME/CE activity. It identifies professional practice gaps and supports the creation of learning objectives that address measurable outcomes. Following ACCME, ANCC, and ACPE guidelines ensures that the needs assessment meets regulatory and accreditation standards.

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Purpose of a Needs Assessment

- ✓ Identify existing gaps in knowledge, competence, or performance
- ✓ Justify the need for the CME/CE activity
- ✓ Support the creation of measurable learning objectives and outcomes
- ✓ Ensure alignment with professional standards and current clinical evidence

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Sources of Data for Needs Assessment

- ✓ Peer-reviewed literature and clinical guidelines
- ✓ National and state health statistics
- ✓ Participant surveys and self-assessments
- ✓ Hospital/clinic quality improvement data
- ✓ Feedback from previous CME/CE activities
- ✓ Specialty board requirements and competency frameworks

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Steps to Develop a Compliant Needs Assessment

1. Identify the target audience and scope of the activity
2. Collect and review data from multiple sources to identify practice gaps
3. Determine whether the gap is in knowledge, competence, or performance
4. Document evidence supporting the existence of the gap
5. Align the gap with planned educational objectives and outcomes
6. Prepare a written needs assessment summary for the activity file

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Best Practices for Compliance

- ✓ Use multiple, credible sources to justify the practice gap
- ✓ Clearly link the identified gap to learning objectives
- ✓ Maintain supporting documentation for audit readiness
- ✓ Avoid commercial influence in identifying educational needs
- ✓ Update the needs assessment for recurring or enduring activities

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Sample Needs Assessment Statement

“Recent updates to hypertension guidelines emphasize individualized therapy, yet surveys indicate that over 40% of primary care physicians are unaware of recommended first-line treatment changes. A targeted CME activity addressing guideline implementation and patient selection is needed to improve clinical decision-making and patient outcomes.”

