Continuing education (CE) is a subject familiar to all professionals, including veterinarians. Licensed professionals are required to obtain CE credit, in some form or another, to meet annual relicensure requirements. Veterinary medicine is no different, with state licensure and some board specialties requiring proof of annual CE contact hours. As the CE requirement has become ingrained within the veterinary profession, many options through which veterinarians can meet their yearly CE quota have become available. One of the primary publications that has catered to veterinarians seeking CE credit is Compendium: Continuing Education for Veterinarians, which was recently accepted for indexing on Medline. Therefore, I believe there’s no better venue than this journal for an editorial regarding CE.

Attending a meeting only to obtain CE credit, because you usually go to the meeting, or out of convenience will help perpetuate poor, unfulfilling experiences. Veterinary medicine is advancing and changing rapidly, and these advances will be less daunting if we are knowledgeable and informed. CE allows us to obtain this knowledge and information and, in many instances, share the experience with colleagues.

The first national CE conference I attended was during my senior year in veterinary school. While there, I interviewed with a veterinarian who expressed a desire to leave the conference early, apparently as he had in past years. Based on this conversation, I understood the underlying reason for him wanting to leave early to be a belief that he was not getting a significant return on his time, effort, and expense. I was surprised to learn he had a similar attitude regarding other CE conferences and had been at the current conference for only 1 day. This conversation did not give me a good impression of CE meetings, being the skeptical fourth-year veterinary student I was at the time. Since that meeting more than 20 years ago, CE and the veterinary profession have changed in ways that no one could have imagined. But has the attitude of veterinarians toward CE changed in that time?

Experienced veterinarians should act as CE role models and mentors to veterinary students and recent graduates. Positive mentoring of young veterinarians in the CE experience may promote a lifelong positive attitude toward postgraduate learning. In addition, the collegial interaction could inspire young veterinarians to become involved in organized veterinary medicine.

In surveys asking veterinarians why they attend conferences, the responses are consistent—to obtain CE credit. What does that mean, and how does it affect the profession? States are demanding more CE contact hours and verification for them. I believe these increased demands are working because more CE contact hours are being submitted by veterinarians with increased proof that they attended presentations, participated in online seminars, or completed an assigned task. But is the profession improving through CE?

Veterinary CE opportunities are available from the local level to the international level. Using data generated from past attendees or members of an association, speakers are invited to provide an educational program. I believe the underlying reason for most, if not all, CE requirements is to ensure that practicing veterinarians remain educated regarding the ever-changing medical and surgical developments within our diverse profession. However, upgraded CE requirements and the underlying reason for their implementation do not guarantee that the objective(s) will be met. Regardless of how an individual’s CE requirements are met (e.g., meetings, Compendium, Web-based
learning, exhibit halls), the educational benefits are achieved only when there is a positive attitude toward and a focus on learning.

Increased and future involvement of veterinarians in veterinary meetings and organizations is not limited to the young. With technologic advances and air travel, it has never been easier to take advantage of worldwide veterinary educational opportunities. The advancement of the European specialty colleges and large, international veterinary CE congresses (e.g., British Small Animal Veterinary Association, World Veterinary Association) has expanded veterinary medical educational opportunities far beyond North America. The global connection has been recognized and encouraged through the AVMA. Past AVMA President Roger K. Mahr focused on the “one world, one health, one medicine” concept in his address to the Veterinary Leadership Conference on January 6, 2007. He said that communication is the means of implementing this concept. The keys to good communication are knowledge and information, which in turn lead to credibility for veterinarians and the profession in the eyes of the client, general public, and global community. Increased worldwide veterinary communication and collaboration will enable all veterinarians to answer questions and confront the seemingly endless medical challenges of today and the future.

Veterinarians have many opportunities to obtain postgraduate education. The attitude of veterinarians when they participate in their selected CE programs determines the return on their time and monetary investment. Careful selection of the CE opportunity in which their limited time will be invested allows increased participants satisfaction. At the same time, all veterinarians need to ensure that their voices are heard regarding CE by completing conference evaluations and online surveys and by writing letters to publications such as Compendium. As I have learned from the first conference I attended up to the most recent one, 21 years later, the full benefit and spirit of CE can be achieved only when a veterinarian becomes an interactive participant in the educational experience by having the right attitude and focus. As we each go, so goes our profession.