Executive Summary
Call for Comment: Accredited Education Delivered via Online and Social Media Platforms

On September 12, 2023, the Accredited Council for Continuing Medical Education (ACCME) opened a Call for Comment on Accredited Education Delivered via Online and Social Media Platforms. As platforms for delivering CME online have proliferated, ACCME was asked to clarify its expectations for accredited providers.

In seeking to support and facilitate the evolution of CME to meet evolving learner behavior and preferences, and to prevent CME from being constrained by more traditional formats of education, we reviewed our existing policies to develop proposed guidance and invited feedback from all stakeholders on the clarity of our expectations. In addition, ACCME solicited input on a proposed designation for internet platforms, video players, and/or social media channels that wish to host accredited educational content and are willing to demonstrate they meet the ACCME's expectations.

Responses were accepted through October 12, 2023. There were 215 respondents to the online survey; in addition, we received responses via email. This summary includes quantitative and qualitative feedback on the proposed expectations of accredited providers and the proposed ACCME-compliant platform designation. In general, respondents support the expectations and proposed platform but expressed a variety of concerns about the practical implementation and presented an array of potential unintended consequences of crafting additional regulations in this area.

After analyzing the data provided by respondents, the ACCME agreed with the majority of respondents, who felt that the current requirements in the ACCME's Standards for Integrity and Independence (the Standards) provide adequate guidance and protection to support posting accredited CE activities to online and social media platforms. While no additional rules or requirements are therefore planned, ACCME created answers to frequently asked questions related to online and social media platforms to help ensure that accredited providers who choose to use these tools to host and disseminate their content can do so while protecting their learners and protecting the intellectual property of their content. ACCME does not plan to offer a special designation for online platforms but may in the future if circumstances warrant.

Background
The delivery mechanisms for accredited CME/CE have evolved and diversified, especially as accredited providers shifted rapidly to virtual learning during the pandemic. Internet-based education has grown in terms of the number of accredited activities, as well as the number of learner interactions with those activities. Educators have increasingly inquired about the use of video-based content, the independence of internet platforms for live and enduring activities, and the incorporation of social media both for the purpose of facilitating learning and engaging learners. These questions largely revolve around compliance with the Standards for Integrity and Independence in Accredited CE. The ACCME considers virtual spaces (internet platforms, social media channels) the venue for the accredited education. The ACCME's expectations related to the educational space are the same whether the education is in-person or virtual.

In the call for comment, ACCME solicited feedback on 1) a proposed a designation for companies such as internet platforms, video players, and/or social media channels that wish to host accredited educational content and are willing to demonstrate they meet the ACCME's

expectations; and 2) a set of enhanced expectations of accredited providers in managing accredited education on these platforms.

The Survey

For each expectation, ACCME asked:

- Is the expectation clear and appropriate?
- What modifications do you suggest?
- Do you foresee challenges or unintended consequences in meeting this expectation?

The survey asked if respondents supported the proposed ACCME-compliant platform designation and requested any additional feedback about the designation. The survey also offered respondents an opportunity to provide any other feedback on the topic.

Who Responded?

Of the 215 responses, 70% came from an accredited CME provider. Of those, nearly half were ACCME-accredited. Responses were received from every provider type. A coalition of over 30 accredited providers responded to the survey by submitting comments via email.

Figure 1. Responses by Accreditor
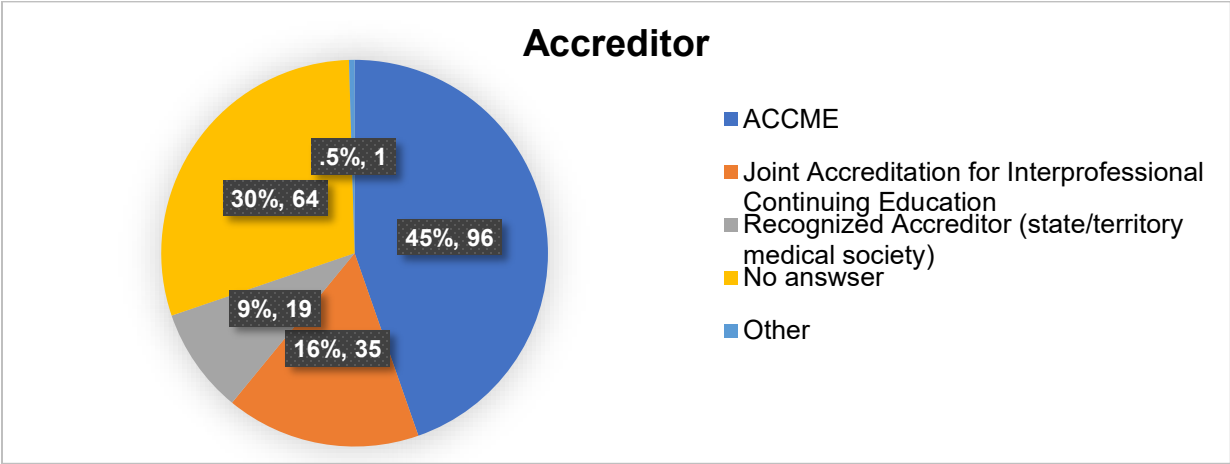
Table 1. Responses by Organization Type

| Organization Type	Number	Percentage
Hospital/healthcare delivery system	59	27%
Nonprofit (physician membership organization)	46	21%
Publishing/education company	41	19%
Other	22	10%
School of medicine	21	10%
Nonprofit (other)	14	7%
Insurance company/managed care company	6	3%
Government or military	2	1%
No answer	4	2%
Total	**215**	**100%**

What We Heard

<u>Quantitative Feedback</u>

All six expectations were regarded as clear and appropriate. Reactions to whether respondents foresee challenges or unexpected consequences in meeting the expectations were mixed.

Table 2. Feedback on ACCME Expectations

Expectation	Clear and Appropriate		Foresee Challenges	
	Yes	**No/No Answer**	**Yes**	**No/No Answer**
Accountability	80%	20%	52%	48%
Marketing and Advertising	87%	13%	40%	60%
Reposting Video Material	75%	25%	41%	59%
Protecting Intellectual Property	84%	16%	30%	70%
Protecting Learners' Identity and Data	76%	24%	50%	50%
Protecting Learners on Social Media	77%	23%	50%	50%
Aggregate	**79.8%**	**20.2%**	**43.8%**	**56.2%**

Most respondents supported the proposed ACCME-Compliant Platform Designation, with 146 (68%) supporting and 54 (25%) not supporting. Fifteen (7%) did not respond.

Figure 2. Support for ACCME-Compliant Platform Designation
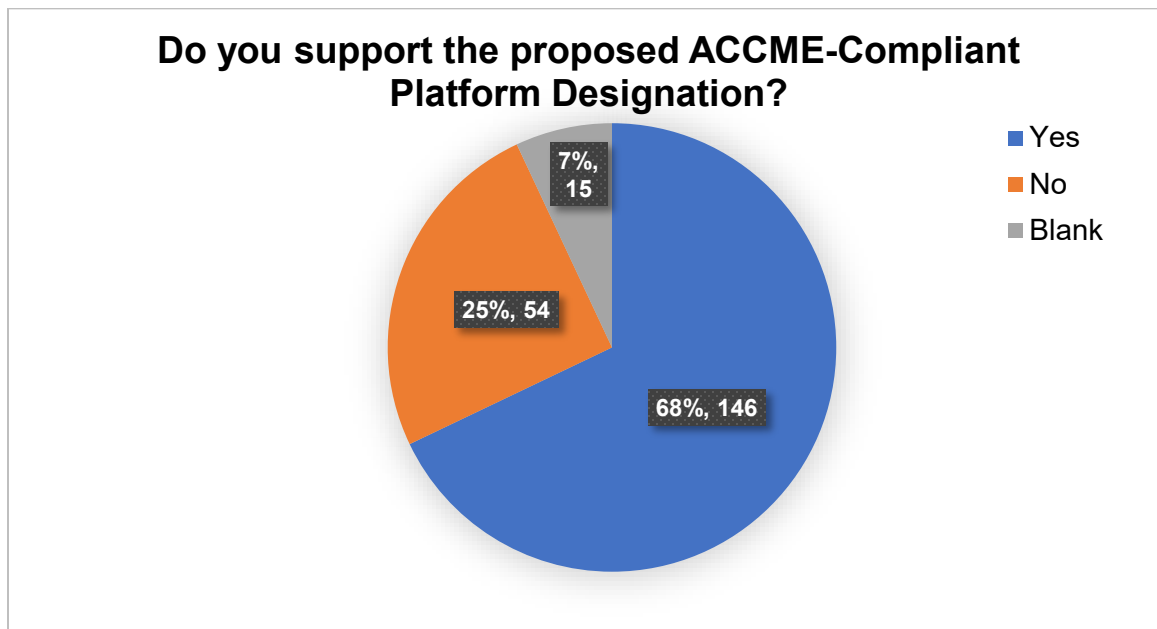
Qualitative Feedback

In open-ended feedback, respondents explained concerns they have with the proposed expectations. The following main themes emerged:

Uniformity in Expectations: Whether education is delivered in-person or virtually, ACCME's expectations related to the educational space should remain consistent. The platform or delivery mechanism should not alter the standard of quality or independence.

Existence of Rigorous Standards: Accredited providers already adhere to ACCME's rigorous standards like the Standards for Integrity and Independence in Accredited Continuing Education, Core Accreditation Criteria, and relevant ACCME policies. Is it necessary to reiterate expectations via new digital-only guidance? There is potential for regulatory redundancy and confusion for providers.

Perception of Online Education: Specific rules for social media platform-based education might unintentionally paint it as non-compliant or unacceptable. Implicitly, it might seem as though ACCME guidance is only apt for traditional live activities.

Adapting to Digital Evolution: How will ACCME's highly specific online guidance adapt to the fast-paced evolution of the digital world? Notably, the current guidance doesn't explicitly address transformative technologies like artificial intelligence.

Engagement with Social Media Giants: The CME sector, being comparatively small, might not gain the necessary attention or influence with large multinational social media companies. Driving substantial changes in their terms of use for medical education seems improbable. If this level of change is possible, the changes may take a long time.

Provider Autonomy: Individual providers should still retain the freedom to decide if they would like to use social media platforms for educational purposes, irrespective of the broader challenges with these platforms.

Below is a summary of feedback for each expectation:

Accountability
While there is support for ACCME's intention to ensure accountability, the practical implementations are viewed as challenging, potentially burdensome, and sometimes unrealistic. Adjustments in expectations and clearer definitions are sought for better alignment with the realities of the digital age. Many providers called for adherence to current Standards of Integrity & Independence rather than introducing new ones. Clarification on demonstrating compliance is sought to ensure reasonable expectations.

Marketing and Advertising
Respondents generally support education-marketing separation but find the new expectation redundant and challenging, especially on platforms beyond their control. Providers note that the cannot control ads on free platforms like YouTube, Vimeo, and podcasts, limiting content distribution options, and providers can't manage interactions on their posts. Many noted that this expectation duplicates existing guidelines, particularly Standard 5.

Reposting Video Material
Respondents reiterated their concern about being held accountable for factors beyond their control, and that the proposed expectation is redundant with existing ACCME Standards. Importantly, many noted that the focus should be broader than one multimedia format, acknowledging the evolving nature of technology and promoting open knowledge sharing.

Protecting Intellectual Property
While the intent of the guidelines is understood, respondents requested more specificity, practicality, and alignment with existing processes. The overarching sentiment is the need for balance between protecting intellectual property and ensuring educational content remains accessible and manageable for providers.

Protecting Learners' Identity and Data
Accredited providers grapple with the challenges of maintaining data privacy on digital platforms while still ensuring an inclusive educational experience. Some respondents feel that the expectations on them are expansive and are increasingly concerned that the focus on ineligible companies might overlook broader data misuse issues across platforms.

Protecting Learners on Social Media
Respondents understand the need to protect the integrity of educational content, have reservations about the feasibility of implementing strict controls on social media platforms, and request clearer guidelines, flexibility, and a balanced approach from ACCME.

Do you support the proposed ACCME-Compliant Platform Designation?
Overall, while there is some support for the idea, respondents also have concerns and questions about its implementation, costs, and practical implications. There is a clear call for more guidance, education, and collaboration if the proposal moves forward.

Some respondents see value in the ACCME-Compliant Platform Designation and the possibility of it enhancing the quality of online accredited education. However, the existence of such a platform may raise questions about the legitimacy of otherwise accredited education, developed under a provider's accreditation policies and procedures and hosted on a non-designated platform.

General Comments
Several providers recommended that ACCME:
- Survey the leading technology platforms' terms of use boilerplate to analyze areas of concern and risk for the sake of accredited providers,
- And seek the outside counsel of established technology, social media, contract, and copyright environment and law experts in a formal working group to develop guidance to meet their stated objectives of protecting accredited providers before implementing additional policies or procedures that govern providers' work.

Moving Forward
After analyzing the data, ACCME agreed with the majority most respondents, who felt the current requirements provide adequate guidance and protection to support posting accredited CE activities to online and social media platforms. Respondents felt strongly that new expectations were not necessary, and although they were in favor of creating a new designation, it was not a priority.

In response to several requests for additional guidance, ACCME created answers to frequently asked questions related to online and social media platforms. Accredited providers remain entirely responsible for protecting learners who engage with their materials and should protect the intellectual property of their content. Healthcare professionals are valuable marketing targets so their identities and contact information must be protected and withheld from those who would seek to use their participation in accredited continuing education to target them. Unless accredited providers are careful, materials posted online or in the public domain may be harvested or scraped by artificial intelligence for secondary purposes that threaten the protections that learners, faculty, and providers deserve.

ACCME does not currently plan to offer a special designation for online platforms but may in the future if circumstances warrant. Any organization may apply to ACCME to determine their suitability to provide services to accredited providers.

As these platforms and technologies continue to evolve, ACCME may revisit these next steps at regular intervals to ensure alignment with accreditation standards and address concerns.

ACCME appreciates the many thoughtful and constructive suggestions and feedback provided by respondents to help us clarify our expectations for accredited providers on the delivery of CME via online and social media platforms.