

EDITOR'S PAGE



## What Makes General Cardiovascular Education Courses Successful?



Valentin Fuster, MD, PhD

*"A teacher is a compass that activates the magnets of curiosity, knowledge, and wisdom in the pupils."*

—Ever Garrison (1)

I have been in the business of medical education for more than 30 years, and I have found the process incredibly rewarding on a personal level. During this time, there have been fluctuations in interests and the style of presentations, and I have gleaned a few lessons about what makes a course or seminar consistently successful and well-attended. I sometimes think about a general cardiologist's career and education as analogous to maintaining the well-being of a car, which requires check-ups via oil changes or tune-ups, as well as constant nourishment through gasoline. However, the roads on which our cars (careers) are traveling have become bumpy, as a result of: 1) the increasing, ever-moving target to maintain accreditation as a general cardiologist and a subspecialist; 2) the proliferation in the number of courses from which to choose; and 3) the cost of attending these meetings, especially when many providers are cutting budgets.

In general, there are 2 types of education courses or seminars. One type comprehensively covers the whole cardiovascular specialty through a breadth of topics, with the latest scientific updates and approaches across multiple patient populations to ensure clinical relevance for translation to practice. Those who benefit from these more generalized courses, such as the annual New York Cardiovascular Symposium, can range from cardiovascular specialists to internists and to nurses in cardiology. The other types of courses or seminars are much more specialized,

focused on a specific topic or subspecialty. Some of these more specialized courses have been highly successful, especially in the fields of interventional cardiology and cardiac electrophysiology. In the following text, I will only focus on more general cardiovascular courses.

### KEYS TO SUCCESS

We have experience in organizing and hosting 3 courses in 3 continents over a 10-year span—one in the United States, one in Europe, and one in Asia. They focus on all aspects of the cardiovascular field, including what new developments have transpired over the past year, as well as providing an outline for the future. Every year, these courses have experienced an increase in attendance of 50 to 100 individuals. In my opinion, there are 5 reasons for their success and attendance growth:

1. *Scheduling.* These courses are scheduled close to the weekend, so most practitioners are less likely to have to take time off from their providers.
2. *Comprehensiveness.* We design courses that seek to integrate all aspects of the cardiovascular field that are important to the clinician, specifically, new developments that have transpired over the last year on each subject and what will evolve in the near and distant future.
3. *Speakers.* We select speakers with clinical expertise who are able to present topics within the context of integrating them with the overall cardiovascular field. Importantly, such speakers are recognizable and are passionate about the subject matter.
4. *Presentation length.* About the presentations, they should be a minimum of 20 min and a maximum of 30 min. Lectures that are <20 min tend to be little

more than a vocabulary, and, in my view, they usually do not fulfill the educational mandate of a comprehensive review. However, if the presentations, which tend to be dense in content, surpass 30 min, the speaker tends to lose the attention of the audience.

5. *Interactive.* It is important to allow the audience to present written questions to the speakers, who are encouraged to answer the questions in  $\leq 1$  min. I have found this to be most successful when using a speaker panel to conclude a particular session. Thus, a 30- to 45-min question/answer session can result in 30 to 40 questions. This opportunity gives the audience a sense of participation and inclusion.

### THE ROLE OF SPONSORS

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There is a practical reality that such continuing medical education courses or seminars require some kind of sponsorship. The most attractive and trustworthy form of sponsorship is from the cardiovascular societies, such as the American College of Cardiology, the European Society of Cardiology, the American Heart Association, and others. Of course, such societies depend on support from industry to host these courses, but their bylaws ensure an adherence to standards and proper disclosure policies. Such organizations also lend important credibility to our courses. In my view, in the future,

these types of comprehensive courses could offer maintenance of certification credits for busy practitioners who choose to attend and actively participate, if the proper learning objectives are clearly pre-established.

### RESILIENCE

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I decided to write this Editor's Page because I have been asked the following question with such frequency over the past few months when I travel nationally and internationally: How do I chair such successful general cardiovascular education courses? As I have tried to outline, there is a clear prescription to designing and hosting dynamic, well-attended medical education courses. Importantly, organizers should not become discouraged if their efforts do not immediately prove successful, as it takes approximately 2 to 3 years for such courses or seminars to result in gratifying results. However, the rewards—both professionally and personally—are truly worth the resilience required to stick to one's efforts to produce a successful course for our general cardiologist colleagues.

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### REFERENCE

1. Footstep Training. Available at: <http://footstep-training.com/teaching-motivational-quote-teacher-compass-activates-magnets-curiosity-knowledge-wisdom-pupils/>. Accessed March 9, 2016.