Planners of medical meetings face a significant challenge before their events even begin: how to draw busy medical professionals away from their practices to attend.

The 2018 Global Meetings and Events Forecast from American Express Meetings & Events found that physicians, on average, receive 16 invitations to medical events each year. Of those 16, they attend about half. The study also found that content drives the decision to attend or stay home.

“We’ve always tried to make sure the education is top-notch at our events,” said Nicole Malcom, director of operations for the American Holistic Nurses Association (AHNA). “We don’t make our presenters conform to a classroom style. Instead, we allow them to choose different room setups that are more conducive to their learning style.”

Medical professionals must earn a certain number of continuing medical education (CME) credits in order to maintain competence and learn about evolving areas of their fields. As a result, medical meetings that allow healthcare professionals to earn CMEs have a leg up over conferences that do not.

In the case of programs that serve as CMEs, strict regulations govern the conduct and even the language that presenters may use during the event. The American Nurses Credentialing Center (ANCC), for example, requires that presenters avoid any appearance of self-promotion during continuing-education presentations.

“Our presenters cannot even use the words ‘You can visit me in the exhibit hall for more information’ because the goal is to provide evidence-based facts rather than promote products,” Malcom said. “As a result, it can be very difficult to gain sponsorships because the companies that sponsor expect to promote their products.”

Although every conference is different, it’s important for planners to understand the regulations that govern medical education events.

“We train for a full year to understand what the ANCC requirements are, as well as the things you can and cannot do, and what the requirements are for each industry,” Malcom said. “Errors could really be costly and can keep you from getting attendees back each year.”

The AHNA just finished its six-day annual conference in Niagara Falls, NY, which brought together 500 holistic nurses for continuing-education workshops, networking opportunities, meeting with vendors and attending keynote speeches, as well as an opportunity to recharge.

“Because our industry focuses on holistic practices, we choose destinations that offer our nurses the chance to interact with nature,” Malcom said. “Even if we find a great property that we love, we won’t likely return to that location for a number of years because our nurses enjoy the travel that goes with the conference.”

Tulsa, Okla., will host the 2019 AHNA conference.

According to Kristen Vencl, national sales manager for the Tulsa Convention & Visitors Bureau, the AHNA will host its meeting at the Hyatt Regency Tulsa, which is also the location of the convention.

“Tulsa’s bike-share system, its vast outdoor

---

**MARKET SEGMENT REPORT: MEDICAL & PHARMACEUTICAL MEETINGS**

**MEDICAL Meetings**

Getting the Attention of Busy Professionals  
By Shannon Rasmussen

Sponsored by:

**Fully-Equipped: The Hyatt Regency Tulsa, which will host the 2019 AHNA Conference, has everything the Holistic nursing group needs for their conference, under one roof.**
offerings and the proximity of those offerings to the host hotels make it an ideal option for groups like AHNA looking to get outdoors,” Vencl said. “They’ll have everything under one roof with some fun off-site activities within minutes from their host hotel.”

**Accommodating a Variety of Schedules**
Because medical professionals have such busy schedules, Malcom works to create a flexible conference that can accommodate huge differences in schedules.

The event includes a pre-conference prior to the event, which is two days of intensive learning. The full conference includes access to all content except the pre-conference. Finally, the one-day offerings consolidate a topic into a single day of learning.

“We want to create the ultimate conference experience, so we offer lots of different opportunities,” she said. “We schedule our conference over weekdays and a weekend to accommodate a variety of schedules. If your days off fall in the middle of the week, you can still take advantage of the event.”

Part of that equation means being near an airport with easy access to the host facility, which is exactly what makes the ATL Airport District (the District) a perfect choice for planners with similar needs.

Made up of four cities on the south side of Atlanta, the District connects directly to the world’s busiest airport and is situated near three major Interstate highways. As a result, it’s a logical destination for conferences that attract busy professionals.

“We’re within a two-hour flight of 80 percent of the U.S. population, with 225 cities offering non-stop flights to Atlanta,” said Meg Oxford, director of sales for the District. “Most people can fly here without a series of connecting flights, so they can get in and out quickly. If they have a business to operate or a soccer game to get back to, the ease of getting in and out of the Atlanta airport is a major advantage.”

The District also boasts Georgia’s second-largest convention center, the Georgia International Convention Center, with 400,000 square feet of meeting space and three campus hotels, all conveniently connected to the Atlanta airport by way of a complimentary skytrain.

Although not connected to the skytrain, the immediate area surrounding the District boasts 60 hotels with 8,000 hotel rooms, most of which offer shuttle transportation to the airport.

“Visitors can move directly from the airport to the convention center or campus hotels and nearby hotels without being exposed to the elements,” Oxford said. “They don’t have to schedule transportation or navigate traffic. If they want to focus on meetings or business without distractions, the District saves them time and money.”

**Attracting International Participants**
The American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons (AAOS) hosted 27,000 healthcare professionals at its annual conference in New Orleans & Company. “Associations typically experience strong registration numbers when meeting in New Orleans.” The city’s footprint, as well as its state-of-the-art Biomedical Innovation District, draw large meetings to the area.

**Things to Remember When Planning Medical Meetings**
Medical meetings provide important opportunities for healthcare professionals to network and learn about developments in their particular industry. The annual requirement for continuing medical education credits provides a great incentive for professionals to step away from their practices for a few days to gather with others in the industry.

The following considerations will help you plan a medical meeting that makes people want to attend:

1. **Ask lots of questions.**
   “The more questions you ask prior to the visit, the more prepared you’ll be,” said Nicole Malcom, director of operations for the American Holistic Nurses Association. “I send at least 100 questions prior to the visit and I arrive for my site visit with about 50 or 60 more. The more information you have, the easier it will be to successfully host your program without unnecessary stress.”

2. **Consider each destination’s history of hosting medical events.**
   New Orleans has hosted the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons several times, as well as other medical association meetings. “We have a history of hosting many medical meetings, both small and large,” said Robert Reso, vice president of convention sales for New Orleans & Company. “Associations typically experience strong registration numbers when meeting in New Orleans.”

3. **Find family-friendly venues with a variety of activities.**
   “Lots of meeting planners find our proximity to downtown Atlanta beneficial,” said Meg Oxford, director of sales for the ATL Airport District. “We’re close enough to downtown to take advantage of the offerings there without being right in the middle of it. We’re also seeing a trend toward more outdoor activities, so we’re building mountain bike trails to allow visitors to enjoy outdoor activities.”

---

**Convenience: A skytrain connects venues in the Atlanta Airport District to the Hartfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport.**
Orleans earlier this year, with international attendees making up about 35 percent of the group. Because of the event’s large attendance, the AAOS tends to rotate consistently through an established group of properties that are able to accommodate its specific meeting requirements.

“Meeting location for the annual meeting is critical for the success of the meeting,” said Susan McSorley, director of conventions, courses and exhibits for the AAOS. “Our selection is based on space in the convention center to satisfy our meeting and exhibit requirements, as well as a broad range of hotel properties close to the convention center.”

McSorley said the AAOS relies heavily on the assistance of the local convention and visitors bureaus to make its events successful.

“Convention center space is the first piece of the puzzle when hosting such a large event, followed by large room blocks at every hotel in the city,” said Robert Reso, vice president of convention sales for New Orleans & Company. “Our compact footprint helps reduce shuttle transportation time, allowing attendees to spend more time on what’s important to them.”

New Orleans has hosted countless medical meetings over the years, aided in part by its proximity geographically.

“New Orleans is centrally located between East and West Coast cities, allowing attendees from all areas of the country to travel here relatively quickly,” Reso said. “In addition, airfare to New Orleans tends to trail behind the national average for airline ticket prices and our climate is very appealing during prime contention months.”

AAOS’s statistics indicate that its members attend the annual meeting every two to three years, which prompted the group to begin offering an OnDemand product for the first time this year.

“It’s always challenging for physicians to attend meetings,” McSorley said. “This year, we captured and recorded the educational content to share with orthopaedic professionals who were unable to attend the meeting. We strive each year to provide new, relevant and valuable content, as well as networking opportunities for all our stakeholders.”

**Incorporating Mobile Technology**

The 2018 Global Meetings and Events Forecast also reported that many healthcare providers, particularly those under the age of 40, prioritize mobile technology when choosing which events to attend.

Like the AAOS, the AHNA continues working to incorporate technology and social media into its events but recognizes that some attendees may not yet be comfortable with interactive options. To that end, the AHNA offers a mobile app for its annual event, as well as electronic and paper options for documents, and provides assistance to those who want help with the technology.

Likewise, the ATL Airport District’s Marriott properties offer a meeting service app that allows planners to manage their events at a moment’s notice and allows participants to track event offerings from their electronic devices.

“All meetings are getting more tech savvy,” Vencl said. “Planners are utilizing more apps and getting material to attendees via websites and apps.”

Malcom is working on a video for next year’s conference in Tulsa that will familiarize nurses with the area prior to their visit. She frequently uses technology to draw attendees to the annual event by providing video footage of the areas’ offerings in the months prior to the event.

Malcom also hires a photographer to attend her events and provides free headshots to the nurses who attend. The AHNA emails the headshots to attendees with information about presenting themselves in a professional light when they submit articles or apply for jobs.

Most of the medical meeting planners also provide the dates for the following year’s event on their calendars. The large attendance at events also makes it necessary to plan well in advance.

“The single most challenging aspect of hosting medical meetings is availability,” Reso said. “The popularity of our destination often necessitates a longer booking window to secure the appropriate space and hotel package.”

McSorley credits innovation as the biggest draw for healthcare professionals.

“It’s important to be innovative at your meeting,” she said. “Creating that ‘wow’ factor draws attendees and connecting people is important to make your meeting a ‘must attend’ event.”
EVENT SURVIVAL

THE 9AM KEYNOTE

1. RIDE SKYTRAIN TO HOTEL

2. STAY OUT LATE WITH CO-WORKERS

3. SLEEP CLOSE TO MEETING

4. HIT SNOOZE 13 TIMES

5. DELIVER EPIC KEYNOTE

6. DROP MIC.

DON'T PLAN YOUR EVENT. CRUSH IT.

OVER 8,000 HOTEL ROOMS | 400K SQ’’ OF CONVENTION SPACE | FREE SKYTRAIN TO AIRPORT

ATLdistrictmeet.com

#ATLDistrict