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Podcasts—A Drill You Can Enjoy!

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Did you know that you can know earn continuing education credits by going to the dentist? While out for a run? While cutting your hair? Thanks to the SOA's relatively new and rapidly expanding library of podcasts, you can earn CE just about anywhere you choose.

For the uninitiated, a podcast is simply a free audio recording that can be downloaded and played back on any computer, tablet or smartphone. Podcasts have been growing in popularity at such a rapid rate that it is difficult to find current statistics. One estimate shows that more than 57 million Americans listen to podcasts at least monthly. The appeal of the podcast medium mirrors the something-for-everyone nature of other web-based media. Whatever your interests, there is certain to be a podcast just for you. I've listened to podcasts ranging from a 12-hour series on the thirteenth-century expansion of the Mongol Empire to a 20-minute discussion of why milk is placed in the back of the grocery store (the answer is as obvious as you'd think).

While perhaps holding less universal appeal than some other more frequently downloaded podcasts, readers of this newsletter may find common ground in the podcasts that are now available through the SOA and, in particular, those produced by the Predictive Analytics and Futurism Section. All of the SOA's podcasts can be found by searching any podcast provider for "Society of Actuaries Podcast Feed." Within the search results, you will find a list of podcasts created by individual sections and by the SOA generally. As with podcasts in general, the SOA podcasts cover a wide range of actuarial subject areas.

The PAF podcasts are hosted by Anders Larson and Shea Parkes, both PAF Section Council members. Each episode is 15 to 25 minutes in length, and many are part of a series introducing listeners to various predictive modeling techniques and topics. Previous episodes have discussed the bias-variance tradeoff that



lies at the heart of many predictive modeling exercises, cross-validation and bootstrapping, penalized regression, random forests, decision trees and ensemble modeling. In addition to the series covering specific modeling topics, the podcast has also discussed other special topics. One recent episode featured an interview with leaders of a firm that has been expanding its predictive modeling capabilities and discussed the approach they had used to build out and deploy those new capabilities.

Using podcasts as one component of meeting your continuing education requirements offers three distinct benefits. First, it's difficult to beat "free," especially in the realm of actuarial continuing education. Second, the convenience is unparalleled. Episodes can be downloaded in seconds and listened to wherever you go. Third, and most importantly, the podcast vehicle provides access to leading experts providing highly current information. Even conference presentations and newsletter articles are planned months in advance, but podcasts can be put together very quickly and can provide actuaries with highly relevant and recent information.

At the risk of damning with faint praise, I can personally report that the PAF podcasts are far better than the sound of the dentist's drill. Better than that, the SOA's library of podcasts are a great new way to stay current and to help meet your continuing education requirements. ■



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