

DELAWRITER



The Quarterly Newsletter of the American Medical Writers Association—Delaware Valley Chapter (AMWA-DVC)

SPRING 2010

FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

As you can see, the *Delawriter* has a new look and format. An online-only version is not only “greener,” but means faster newsletter access for you. Thank you for your patience while the *Delawriter* has undergone its “makeover.” Also look at the DVC’s new Web site where you can register for upcoming events and use available resources for your career.

If you would like to volunteer for the *Delawriter*, e-mail me at Delawriter@amwa-dvc.org. Better yet, get involved in the DVC—there are many opportunities that can easily fit in your schedule. Want to know how you can get involved? E-mail Linda Felcone at volunteer@amwa-dvc.org. The time commitment is small, but the rewards are so large.

Speak to any of the executive committee members (see page 9 for contact information) when you are at an upcoming AMWA-DVC meeting and inquire how you can get involved or suggest ideas for future workshops and meetings.

Congratulations to Cyndy L. Kryder, MS, CCC-SP, and Eileen McCaffrey, MA, who will be serving as President-Elect and Secretary, respectively for 2010-2011!! Both have made significant contributions of time, energy, and effort to our chapter. We are happy to formally recognize them and pleased to have them participate in even greater roles in the coming year. Look for their biographies in the next issue of the *Delawriter*.

Special thanks to the AMWA-DVC Nominations Committee (Jennifer Maybin, MA, ELS; Kate Casano, MSc, MSHyg; Don Harting, MA, ELS; and Kent Steinriede). The committee would also like to take this opportunity to thank Kate Casano, who has agreed to assume the duties of Treasurer. Many thanks to Alan Struthers, PhD, who was serving as Treasurer, but needed to step down from the role because of personal commitments. Alan will resume working on the *Delawriter* as an editorial consultant.

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AMWA ADVANCEMENT OPPORTUNITIES

LISA SMITH

If you're like me, your career in medical writing evolved without much planning or forethought—you just did what needed to be done. Now you find yourself wondering about the next best step to distinguish or advance yourself in the field. This article is the first in a series that presents an overview of five possible avenues to advance your professional knowledge and credentials.

AMWA Certification

AMWA has been offering a certification program for over 30 years, and it recently revamped the program structure (the details are available on the AMWA Web site, www.amwa.org, under "Education/Certificates"). Certification is now offered in Essential Skills and four specialty tracks: Business, Composition & Publication, Concepts in Science & Medicine, and Regulatory & Research.

An Essential Skills certificate is a prerequisite for earning a specialty certificate. Each certificate requires successful completion of 8 workshops, including an ethics-related workshop in the relevant track. People who have already earned a Core or Advanced certificate can immediately enroll in 1 of the 4 specialty certificate programs.

To receive credit for a workshop/course, the participant must enroll in a certificate program, complete a precourse assignment, and attend the entire workshop. For workshops attended in person, there is no testing or grading component. Some courses are offered online, but these do have a testing component.

Cost and Time Commitment

Enrollment for certification costs \$150 for members (\$275 nonmembers) and is good for six years. Workshops, which cost approximately \$150 each, are offered at local and national AMWA conferences; additional conference registration fees apply. Self-study courses cost \$159 for members (\$250 nonmembers) and can be taken at any time. No previous medical writing experience is required to enroll in the certification program.

Total cost for certification in one track is approximately \$1,600 to \$2,000, which does not include AMWA dues or the cost of travel or lodging if you are attending a distant conference. Earning an AMWA certification may take 2 to 6 years to complete, depending on how many workshops or courses a participant takes in a timeframe.

Lisa Smith is a Senior Technical Writer and QA Manager at Critical Path Services, LLC, in Garnet Valley, PA.

Editor's note: The *AMWA Journal* recently published an article with additional information about the new AMWA certifications. See Aiello SE. AMWA expands workshop and certificate program. *AMWA Journal*. 2010;25(1):26-28.

In addition to the DVC workshop offerings, such as those offered at the Princeton Conference, the Chicago AMWA chapter will be offering workshops in July. Refer to the Conference Chapter Schedule on the AMWA Web site (www.amwa.org) for more information.

PUBLICATION PLANNING: ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

KIRA BELKIN

When companies publish clinical research results, they need to plan the most effective strategies for disseminating information. What planning happens prior to the preparation of manuscripts? How is the timing and desired place of publication decided? How has increased vigilance of industry sponsorship affected publication planning?

On November 17, 2009, a panel of experts met at the Holiday Inn in Princeton, New Jersey to discuss the steps involved in publication planning. They emphasized how medical writers can and should become more involved in this process, rather than limiting their role to writing manuscripts. The panelists included:

- Sheba Mathew, PhD, Manager Medical Writing – Strategic Scientific Communications, Novo Nordisk, Inc., Princeton, NJ
- Bob Norris, President and founder of Complete Healthcare Communications Inc. (CHC), Chadds Ford, PA
- Kim Pepitone, CMPP, Director of Credentialing and Professional Development for the International Society for Medical Publication Professionals (ISMPP).

The panel was moderated by Brian Bass, President of Bass Advertising and Marketing, Robbinsville, NJ.

Publication Planning Overview

Norris began the presentation with a brief overview of the steps involved in publication planning, such as determining which audiences and journals to target and identifying the need for review articles that highlight the basic science of different disease states. This process begins before the development of the clinical trials.

Issues Affecting Publication Planning

Each of the panelists discussed how the current climate, with increased restrictions regarding industry-sponsored publications and the use of professional medical writers, affected publication planning. Mathew described the process at Novo Nordisk in detail. Authors are involved in manuscript preparation at every step of the process and receive no financial compensation. Pepitone described the credentialing process that ISMPP has developed to certify that professional publication planners are knowledgeable in current best practices, including industry ethical standards.

What Medical Writers Can Do

The panelists also discussed how medical writers should become more involved in publications planning, and much of the question and answer period was devoted to this topic. Norris emphasized that agencies, such as his, wish to partner with writers who bring more to the process than simply writing a manuscript. They value somebody who contributes to the planning process in multiple ways, such as suggesting alternative target audiences or analyzing the competitive landscape. Several of the questions from the audience addressed

See Publication Planning on 4.

PUBLICATION PLANNING: ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES (CONT'D)

the idea that, in this multimedia environment, the definition of a “publication” is currently in flux. The panel agreed that most physicians, in the near future, will not be reading clinical trial results in a paper, magazine-style journal. The exact publication environment that will evolve is impossible to predict. However, there will always be a need to communicate research results to the medical community and a need for professionals who can write clearly and design effective communication strategies.

Kira Belkin has been a freelance medical writer for 10 years, specializing in publications, medical communications, and medical education. She is an active member of AMWA-DVC and has been Chair of the NJ Programs committee since 2003.

14TH ANNUAL PRINCETON CONFERENCE A HUGE SUCCESS! BRIAN BASS

Nearly 70 registrants from as far away as Massachusetts and Virginia attended the AMWA-DVC 14th Annual Princeton Conference in May, making it another great success for the chapter.

The conference featured 4 credit workshops and 2 noncredit workshops, and has become a centerpiece of the AMWA Certificate Program enabling AMWA members and nonmembers alike to work toward their AMWA certificates at the local level.

Thanks go out to the workshop leaders, who gave so graciously of their time and expertise to lead the workshops, and also to the many people behind the scenes who made this year’s conference possible: Ellen Schneider, Eileen Girtten, Kate Casano, Dane Russo, and Melanie Canahuate from AMWA headquarters, and Jason Krol who was instrumental in helping AMWA-DVC launch online registration.

Brian Bass is president of Bass Advertising, Inc and serves as the Princeton Conference Chair.

Did you know that the AMWA-DVC Web site offers...

- Resources and links for medical writers
- A toolkit for new medical writers
- A calendar of upcoming events
- Chapter bylaws
- Online registration for meetings
- Job postings and announcements through the DVC listserv
- Slides and articles from previous AMWA-DVC workshops



MEDIA AND THE PUBLIC HEALTH—H1N1 AS A METAPHOR

ROGER BAERG

On November 12, 2009, the dinner meeting of the AMWA-DVC in Kennett Square, PA was attended by about 30 members and guests who enjoyed an educational and entertaining presentation entitled "Media and the Public Health—H1N1 as a Metaphor" by Marla Gold, MD, Professor and Dean of the School of Public Health, Drexel University. Dr. Gold has long been interested in infectious diseases and began practicing medicine in Philadelphia when people were coming to hospitals with pre-AIDS symptoms. She cares about both the people who contract infectious diseases and the system they must use to receive care. Her expertise in medicine and public health has made her a frequent contact for interviews by the media.

Dr. Gold shared insightful and sometimes humorous personal stories involving a number of interesting experiences she has had with the media. One of her first lessons came when a child died from the measles and she asked her supervisor for advice on how to handle the resulting media coverage. She was told to think of three things to tell the media and no matter what they ask, always come back to those three things.

Gold also shared how visual images are very powerful in the media. For example, public health officials avoided depicting people with masks because of the potentially negative connotations for some individuals. Some initial reactions to H1N1 involved people avoiding pork or airline travel.

According to Gold, reporting medical information should be data driven. At a recent H1N1 question and answer session, Gold shared a brief history of H1N1 before explaining how individuals could reduce the risk of contracting H1N1 by using the same methods for avoiding other flu strains.

Explaining facts about the flu during this interview with an audience seeking health information is relatively easy. However, the task may be more challenging when the audience is also looking for entertainment.

Gold stressed that it is important to present accurate information in a concise manner, but to do so without providing too much data or numbers. It is important to remember one's audience because people may prefer absolute statements instead of detailed data and probabilities. Gold concluded her presentation by encouraging medical writers to continue communicating medical information with concise and accurate information.

Roger Baerg is an AMWA-DVC member and volunteer.

SEEKING WEB-SAVVY VOLUNTEERS

Do you have experience designing and maintaining Web sites? Join the Web site committee and help maintain the AMWA-DVC Web site. For more information, contact Janet Manfre at webchair@amwa-dvc.org.



WRITING FOR VETERINARY PUBLICATIONS

MARIE ROSENTHAL

An editor friend who was laid off from a veterinary journal was turned away by would-be employers of medical journals for physicians because they did not recognize how her editing experience could be applied to human medicine. Yet, in a recent discussion with a pediatrician who worked at a major pharmaceutical company, we realized that both physicians and veterinarians face similar issues, such as the types of concerns from patients and pet owners.

Similarities Between Animal and Human Health Issues

Although animals are living longer due to better nutrition, vaccinations, and sophisticated animal health care, they also face the same health issues that people have as they age: arthritis, cognitive dysfunction, heart disease, diabetes, kidney failure, and weight problems, to name a few. Addressing these health issues requires knowledge of modern veterinary medicine including specialties that once seemed exclusive to human medicine. Some of the 20 veterinary specialties now recognized by the American Veterinary Medical Association include anesthesiology, behavior, cardiology, dermatology, emergency and critical care, internal medicine, oncology, ophthalmology, neurology, radiology, and surgery. Certain procedures, such as hip replacement, kidney transplants, and blood transfusions, are also available for animals. According to the American Pet Products Association, pet-related spending in 2009 was estimated at \$45 billion with veterinary care accounting for approximately \$12 billion.

Veterinary Publications

There are writing and editing opportunities in veterinary publishing. Writers and editors of veterinary publications often have similar duties as writers and editors for human publications. Veterinary publications are divided into the same types of publications as medical writing. There are peer-reviewed publications written by veterinarians for veterinarians. Two or more veterinarians review these publications just like two or more experts in a field review medical publications geared for humans. In addition, there are professional magazines and newspapers that cover the field and are written by medical writers. Typically, a veterinarian serves as the chief medical editor and reviews the content for medical accuracy.

Medical Writing Opportunities

Other writing and editing opportunities for the veterinary field include writing for Web sites, e-newsletters, and meetings and symposia. In addition, writers can create material for animal health companies and pharmaceutical companies. Moreover, there are publications written for pet owners. There are two organizations for dog and cat writers that may be a good starting point: The Dog Writers Association of America (www.dwaa.org) and The Cat Writers' Association (www.catwriters.org). Lastly, there are other pets aside from the family dog or cat, such as exotic animals, horses, and other farm animals. Each species has its own set of publications and Web sites dedicated to its health and welfare.

Given the similarities in writing opportunities for human and veterinary medicine, writers or editors with animal health publication experience can offer comparable skill sets to the medical writing and editing field.

Marie Rosenthal, MS, has been a medical writer and editor for almost 20 years, writing for physicians and veterinarians. In 2007, she won the AMWA's Eric W. Martin Award for an article on canine cognitive dysfunction.

MEDICINE, MONEY, MARKETING, & MORALITY – 20 YEARS LATER

AMY ROVI

Harry A. Sweeney is channeling over 40 years of medical marketing and health communications into political activism. Mr. Sweeney, currently the Managing Partner of SouthPennSquare Associates, described the complexities of the prescription drug marketing environment and his passion for change to 50 AMWA-DVC members on February 16, 2010, at the Radnor Hotel in St. David's, PA with his presentation entitled, "Medicine, Money, Marketing & Morality - 20 Years Later."

Challenges for DTC

He described significant changes in the prescription drug marketing environment in recent years and warned that if industry leaders don't do a better job explaining the complexities of the environment, tough times are ahead. Prescription drug marketing and direct-to-consumer (DTC) advertising have generated and accelerated pharmaceutical sales, rewarded investors, funded drug research and development, promoted pharmaceutical business growth, satisfied patient caregiver demands, and prevented user misunderstandings. Yet, the current environment is under increasing scrutiny by federal regulatory agencies. Political arguments against DTC advertising have focused on costs—not value.

Evidence-based studies would help to demonstrate the value of DTC advertising in today's environment. Numerous articles and books over the past few decades have detailed the economics of medical care and patient demand for quality care, quality service, and fair costs. However, current PubMed search strategies yield less than 10 evidence-based studies regarding DTC advertising, noted Sweeney.

Scientific and Medical Communication Exchange

As a founding member and Chair of the Executive Committee for the Coalition for Healthcare Communication, Mr. Sweeney is passionate about his active political advocacy in the health policy arena. He and the Coalition are advocating for free exchange of scientific and medical communication to improve patient care. The Coalition provides relevant information on current healthcare and health economics issues, and policy positions published by government agencies, industry and other professional organizations.

Clear Communication Strategies

Despite physician bias against advertising, the Coalition asserts that DTC advertising does not compromise patients and issued a statement in November 2009 describing the critical role of DTC advertising in informing patients about treatment choices. DTC advertising often initiates the dialogue between physician and patient when determining appropriate course of treatment. The Coalition supports responsible, effective communication on treatment benefits and risks that improve physician-patient dialogue and foster better care. Mr. Sweeney strongly encouraged AMWA-DVC members to read the issues, white papers, and commentary on the Coalition Web site and get involved.

Amy Rovi has more than 15 years of medical education training and corporate pharmaceutical experience in numerous therapeutic areas. Her company, Medivor, LLC, develops and edits regulatory reports and medical marketing materials for Web and print.

TELL ME MORE—10 TIPS FOR CONDUCTING INTERVIEWS

NANCY ARCHIBALD

Medical writers can be solitary creatures, but there are times when we need to come out of our offices. Knowing how to conduct an interview is a valuable skill when profiling a notable figure, describing a process, or explaining how a program or research study is structured. Here are 10 tips for conducting effective interviews:

1. **Be Prepared.** It's the Boy Scout motto and a good tip for you. If you are profiling a person, read what that person has written or what has been written about him or her; get the interviewee's resume if you can. Similarly, if your subject is a process, study, or program, do your homework. Preparation will help you to ask better questions and gain the attention of your interviewee.
2. **Good Questions Make Good Answers.** Be clear in your own mind about what you require from the interview and how you will use the material. Before you can know what to ask, it is important to figure out what you want to know and why, which is not always an easy task. As Dr. Seuss said, "Sometimes the questions are complicated and the answers are simple."
3. **Go With a Logical Flow.** Order your interview questions in a logical way. Start with easier questions and work toward more difficult ones, but keep questions in a logical order. Think about how your interviewee may answer and have follow-up questions already prepared. Save controversial topics for the end of the interview, just in case the interviewee refuses to answer or cuts the interview short.
4. **No Peeking.** Some interviewees want you to send them your questions before the interview. The problem with this is that they may rehearse their answers or get upset if you add questions or go out of order. Instead of sending the questions beforehand, help the interviewee to prepare by explaining why you are doing the interview and the topics you want to cover.
5. **Three Ears Are Better Than Two.** Ask if you can record the interview. If you can't, take notes, but don't try to write down every word. Listen to what your interviewee has to say, make eye contact, and interject comments to let the interviewee know that you are engaged in what she or he is saying.
6. **Say It Again, Sam.** Repeat important points, steps, or conclusions. If the interviewee is describing a complicated process, strategy, or sequence of events, stop the interviewee periodically to confirm that you understand what he or she has said. This will increase your comprehension and allow you to correct any errors.
7. **Throw Me a Bone.** Don't be afraid to ask for what you need — quotes, opinions, etc. Sometimes you can sit through an entire interview and still have the feeling that you don't really have what you need. Sometimes you just have to ask.
8. **Don't Oversteer.** Although you need to manage the interview to keep it on track, you shouldn't immediately steer the interviewee back on course if she or he starts to wander off topic. Give him or her a minute and see where the conversation is headed. Sometimes the most interesting insights come from letting the conversation meander a bit.

See *Tell Me More on 9*.

TELL ME MORE—10 TIPS FOR CONDUCTING INTERVIEWS (CONT'D)

9. **Write Away!** Write up your notes as soon as possible. This is so important, especially if you have followed the advice above about listening and not trying to write down every single thought. Leave the interview, find a quiet spot, and write. Really.
10. **Say Thank You.** Sending a “thank you” after the interview is about more than just being polite. After writing up your notes, you may find that you are missing information or have additional questions. Contacting the interviewee to say “thank you” allows you to get this information. Also, if you have already established a good rapport, the interviewee may be more willing to answer difficult questions.

Interviewing is a great skill to add to your writer’s toolkit and a wonderful way to make new contacts. Use these tips to help you do your next interview and you’ll be glad that you came out of your office!

Nancy Archibald, MHA, MBA is principal of the Blaxhall Group, LLC and specializes in health services research and policy communications.

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Coming soon in the summer *Delawriter*

- 2010 Freelance workshop highlights
- Honoring DVC volunteers
- June meeting





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CONTRIBUTE TO THE *DELAWRITER*

Calling all DVC members—write for the *Delawriter*. Volunteer to cover an AMWA-DVC event or write articles. If you are interested or would like more details, please e-mail Eileen at Delawriter@amwa-dvc.org.

Some topics of interest include:

- **Helpful hints for Office and Adobe**
- **Graphing strategies**
- **Proofing tools and techniques**
- **Online searching strategies**
- **Volunteering**
- **A day in the life of a....freelance writer, regulatory writer, marketing writer, medical communication writer, or editor**
- **Designing Web sites**
- **Another DVC member who has inspired you**