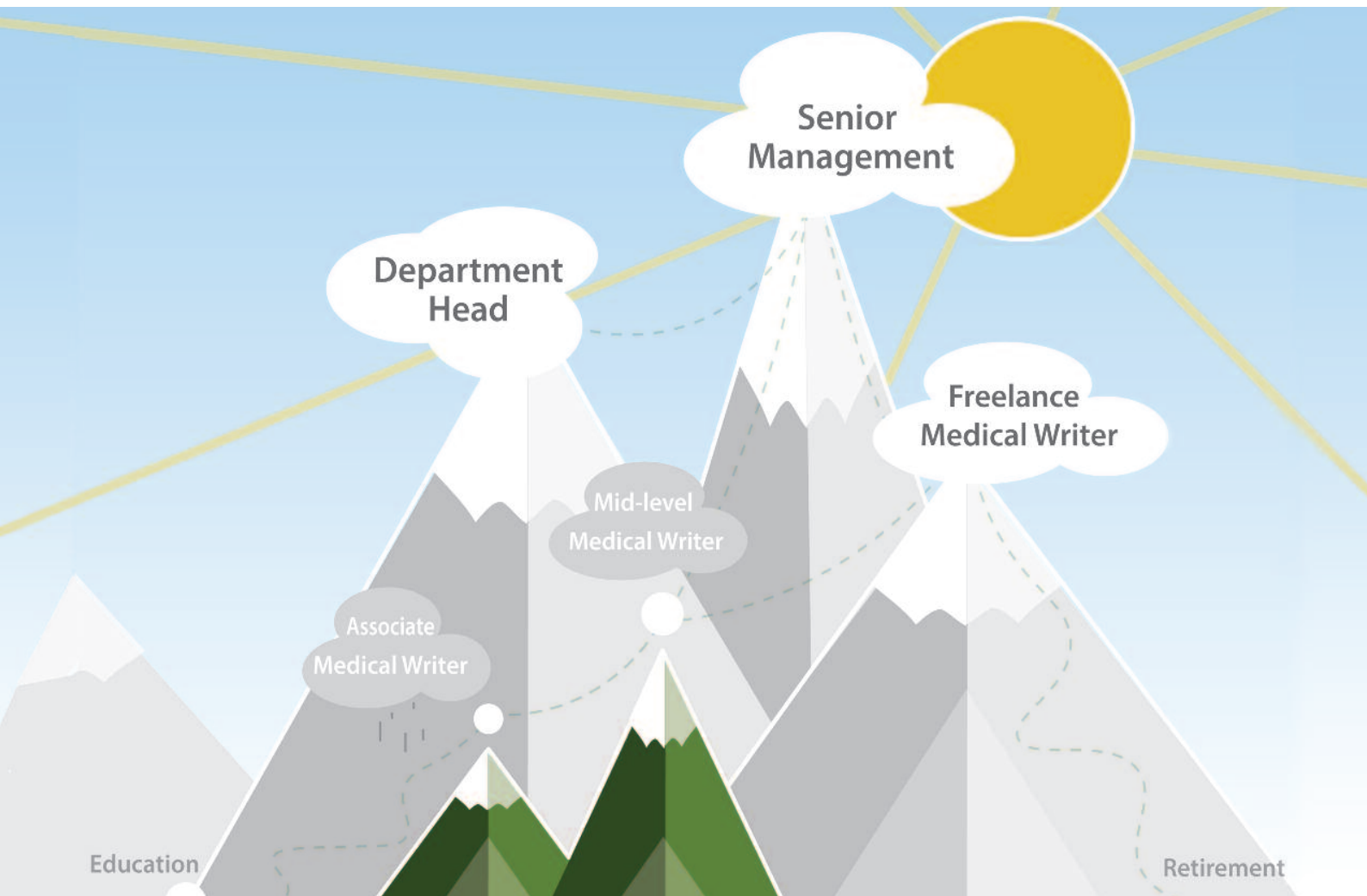


Medical Writing



Careers in medical writing

Also in this issue...

- Clinical trial disclosure landscape and awareness in Japan
- Biowaiver: The magic wand to reduce time and cost
- Benefits of using the EMWA Freelance Directory



EUROPEAN
MEDICAL
WRITERS
ASSOCIATION

Medical Writing is the official journal of the European Medical Writers Association (EMWA). It is a quarterly journal that publishes articles on topics relevant to professional medical writers. Members of EMWA receive *Medical Writing* as part of their membership. For more information, contact mew@emwa.org.

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Cover art by Dr Carola Krause, owner and director of codex-bioMedical Writing Services

Medical Writing

Careers in medical writing

How did we get here?

Medical writers are a breed apart. Unlike many other professions we come from a diverse range of educational and often early professional backgrounds. Yet we find our way to medical writing – or perhaps medical writing finds its way to us – and most of us make a wonderful career of it.

Some of us become medical writers on purpose, such as those most recently joining our ranks from the online and on-site degree programmes in biomedical communications that are popping up around the world. Others become medical writers by accident. For example, reporting the results of our research is simply part of the job, then we discover we like the writing part more than the research. Or perhaps as an early-career writer we answered a help-wanted ad that landed us in a medical communications company having to come up to speed on science and medicine.

Breaking into medical writing isn't easy. Like many careers, we ironically need experience to get the first job but the first job to get that experience is elusive. Still, it is possible, as **Mary Gaskarth** explains – just look at how many medical writers there are! (More about that in a moment.)

No matter how we got here, there are a number of excellent certificate programmes available in which to immerse ourselves, hone our craft, explore new therapeutic areas and types of medical writing, and develop professionally throughout our careers. For many, professional certifications serve to underscore our capability and commitment to the profession, and such certifications may provide a valuable leg up for advancement. There's an excellent update on these programmes by **Danny Benau** in this issue.

Where are we?

Medical writers are everywhere. As the infographic by **Carola Krause** and **Brian Bass** on page 3 shows, worldwide there are approximately 1100 members of EMWA¹ and more than 4000 members of the American Medical Writers Association,² together spanning 58 distinct countries. It is estimated that 1250 (range 1000 to 1500) professional medical writers are based in India.³ In addition, there are approximately 300 members of the Australasian Medical Writers Association,⁴ and more than 1500 members of the International Society for Medical Publication Professionals (ISMPP).⁵ But the medical writing universe is much larger than this.

Consider the number of medical writers who are members of the Drug Information Association, the Regulatory Affairs Professionals Society, and other professional associations for medical writers. Then add the medical writers who don't know they're medical writers. In our travels we've met many people doing the job of medical writing who don't think of themselves as medical writers. Maybe "medical writer" isn't what their company calls their position, or it's not the title on their business card. They may be a writer in a small biotech company, a health journalist, or working within the health system. We need to reach these individuals because their worlds touch ours and ours touches theirs.

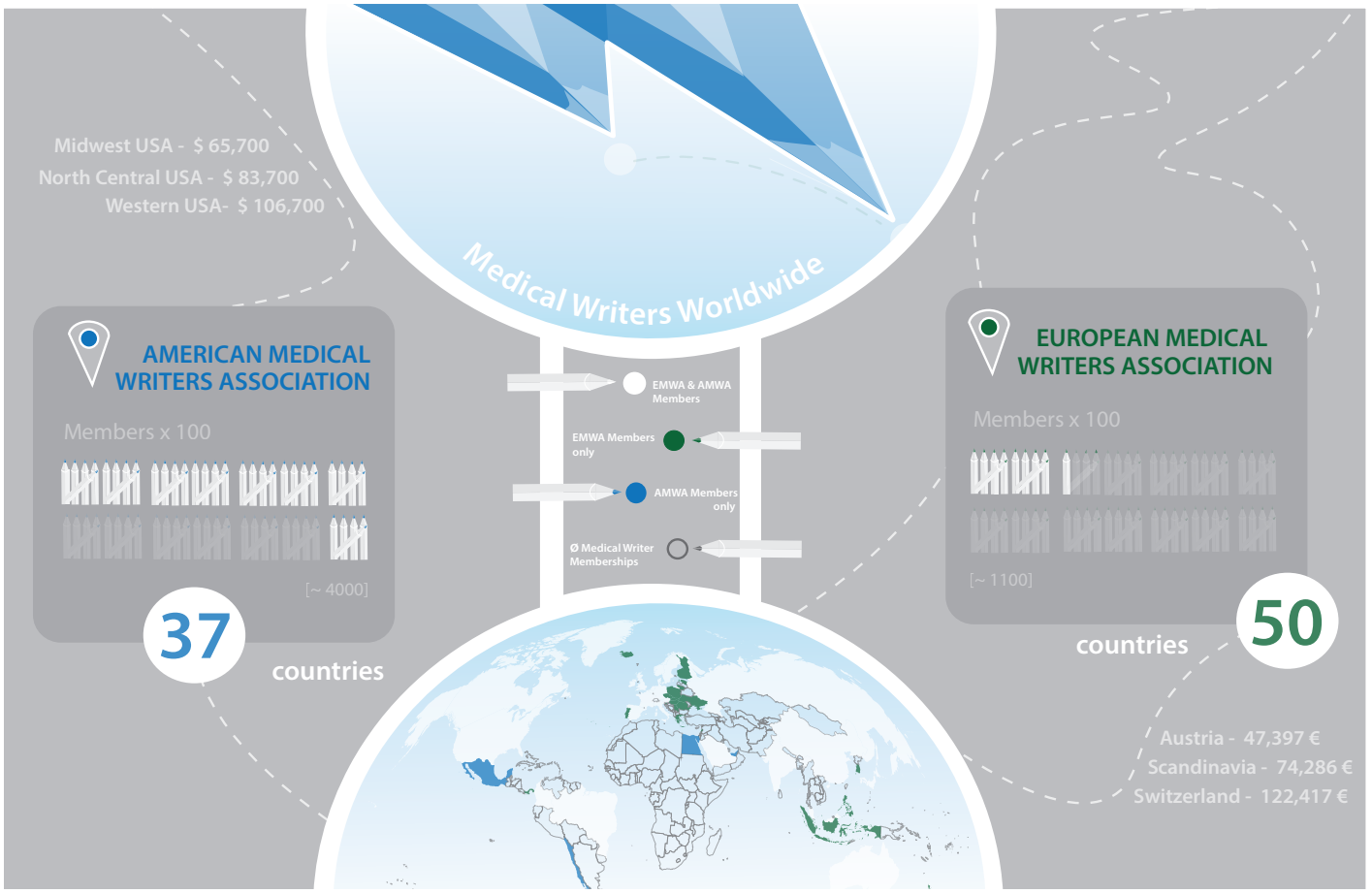
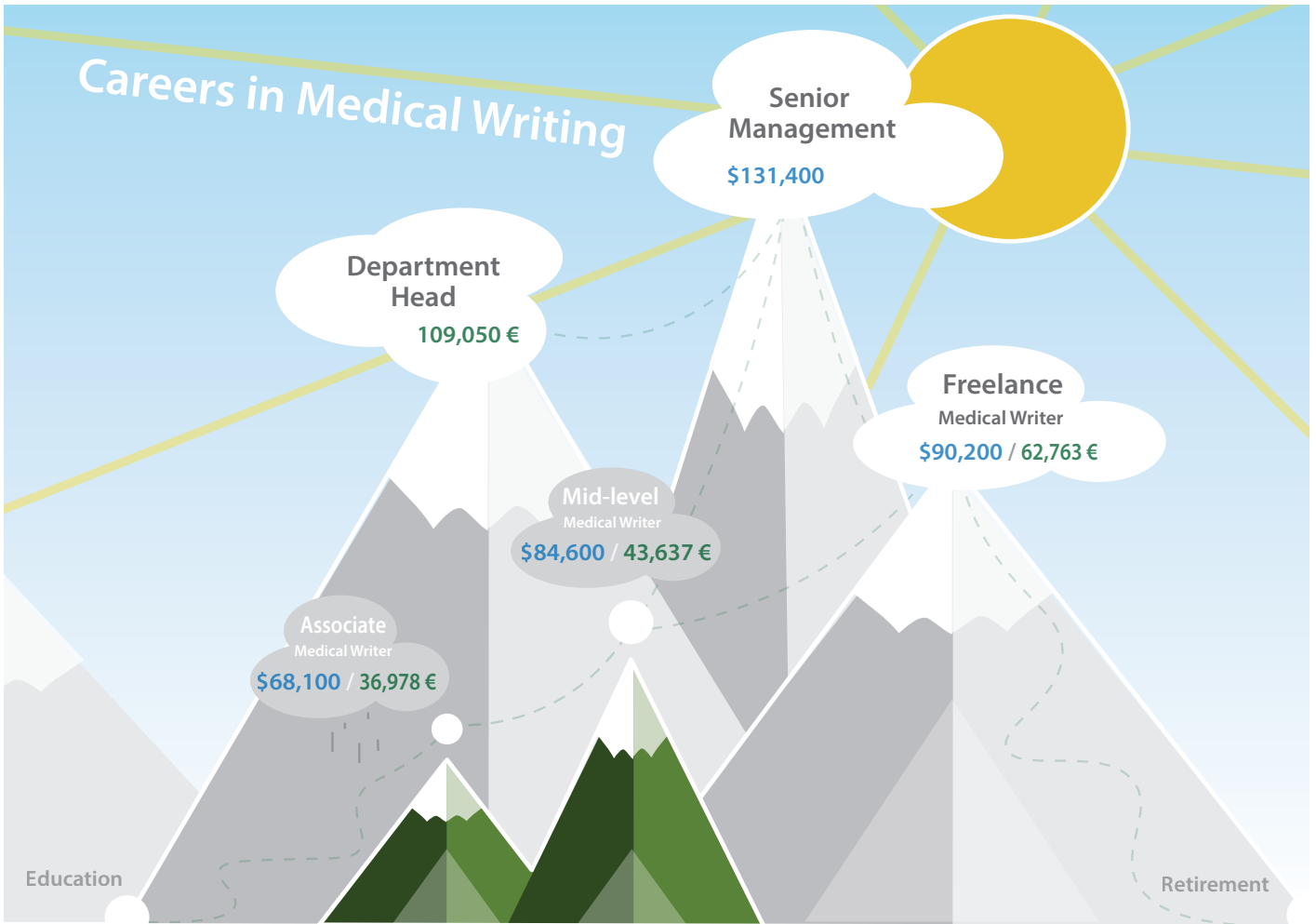
In our travels we've met many people doing the job of medical writing who don't think of themselves as medical writers. Maybe "medical writer" isn't what their company calls their position, or it's not the title on their business card.

Where are we headed?

Medical writers are going places. Just as the back-grounds that directed (or dragged) us here are diverse, so are the trajectories of our careers. The infographic depicts medical writers follow a path of success from associate to senior medical writer, perhaps advancing to department head and eventually into management.

Some medical writers forge their own path into freelancing at some point in their career, and as you'll read in the individual journeys highlighted throughout this issue, sometimes the employment and freelance paths switch back and forth several times. Some medical writers' journeys lead them into different types of medical writing – such as from pharmaceuticals to medical devices, and others to different parts of the world. Each of us plots our own unique course, and as you'll learn in this issue, we get around a lot!

Then there's retirement. Medical writing knows no age limit, for most of us we can work as long as we want. Perhaps we retire from the corporate life to start our freelance business and write merrily into the sunset. Perhaps we take the hard stop as an opportunity to launch an entirely new career, or to rediscover ourselves and our interests.



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About this issue of *Medical Writing*

It has been an honour for us to be invited to serve as guest editors of this special issue of *Medical Writing*. Being seasoned professionals, we looked at the paths our own careers have taken. We thought about our friends and fellow colleagues and the paths their medical writing careers have taken. We realised that medical writing isn't a destination but a journey, a journey that is different for each of us.

We devised this issue to take you briefly on many such journeys through the stories of those who have lived them. It is our hope that if you're just getting started, stories from experienced medical writers will inspire you and give you direction. If you're experienced, we hope the stories will motivate you to continue growing and evolving in new directions.

We begin at the beginning, starting with that initial step from academia to industry as experienced by **Evguenia Alechine**, **Som Basu**, and **Clare Chang**. **Matt Edmonds** made the leap into regulatory writing 18 months ago and is happy where he is. Similarly, **Clare Chang** and **Zuo Yen Lee** took the same step from bench to pen by moving back to their roots in Asia to get that first medical writing job. Throughout this issue you'll find stories on some of your colleagues' breakthrough moments when they got their foot in the door and landed their first medical writing job. It's truly inspiring and entertaining to read these different pathways.

Then comes the career transitions. Some writers change geographies, work environment and/or specialisation. **Clare Gurton** shares her journey from freelancing to employment; **Hye-Ryon Kim** opted to go the opposite



direction – from employment to being self-employed. For those who opt for employment, **Yan Zhou** gives the pros and cons of writing for a pharma company vs a CRO. **Laura Collada Ali** and **Monica Milani** write about how translation and writing cross paths to create opportunities. Two writers who started their careers in pharma, **Gillian Pritchard** and **Sarah Choudhury**, show how they leveraged their pharma-acquired skills to conquer the medical device industry. **Ansgar Dressler** shares his unique experience of shifting from numbers (statistics) to text generation (writing) – and staying there. Changing geographies can be scary yet exciting. Many of the articles already mentioned also deal with geographic shifts. **Szymon Brużewicz** took this shift even further by transferring a thriving freelance business from Europe to South Korea. Crossing the cultural divide was a journey in its own right.

There are some less known but none less interesting subspecialties of medical writing where people can take their career. **Nancy Linford** has carved out her niche in grant writing; **Ana Goios** has combined art and scientific writing in the field of medical illustrations.

The journey to management level is challenging yet rewarding. **Tania Dickson** and **Raquel Billiones** describe their rollercoaster

rides to get there and become good managers. **Julia Cooper** and her colleagues at Parexel reveal the secret of their success in recruiting, training, and developing writers to become one of the biggest CRO medical writing teams today.

The topic of disclosure has gone global. The article on clinical trial disclosure in Japan by **Hiroko Ebina** and **Jocelyn Colquhoun** may not be career-related but nonetheless very important for our readers. And don't forget about our regular sections. A new section on veterinary medical writing is being launched in this issue!

Finally, in case you are wondering what medical writers do after retirement, throughout this issue you'll find stories on how your colleagues are moving into the golden years of their careers. Clearly, there is no end to the medical writing story except the ending you write for yourself.

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