

# A first-timer's perspective on the 2013 EMWA conference in Barcelona

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This story may sound familiar. Having spent my entire career on the academic bench, I decided it was time for a change. I still want to use my brain, I still want to be a part of the biomedical sciences, but I am ready to put the pipette down for good. After some self-reflection, I realised that writing grants and manuscripts is the most enjoyable part of my job. This is in contrast to some of my colleagues, who view writing as a chore which takes time away from research. Fortunately for me, I discovered that medical writing is a viable career option for people who are both passionate about science and about communicating the message it contains.

Anyone contemplating a career change will probably hear two pieces of advice: learn as much as possible about the new career, and meet the people who actually do it. Once I decided to pursue medical writing as my next career step, I engaged in self-study. I learned about what medical writers do on a daily basis, where they come from, what kinds of backgrounds they have, and who employs them. I read numerous FDA and ICH documents. I studied textbooks on drug development and clinical trials. During this time, the internet was a valuable resource, in particular, the EMWA and the AMWA websites.

As my enthusiasm for medical writing grew, the next logical step was to not only meet the people who are medical writers, but to learn from them. The EMWA conferences are ideal in this regard. In

addition to providing extensive networking opportunities, it is also possible to participate in professional workshops taught by experienced medical writers. I was eager to take this next step in my career development, so it was not difficult to convince myself to go to Barcelona and leave behind the cold and dark Finnish autumn for a few days!

I knew almost immediately after collecting my name tag that this conference would fulfil my goals of both learning and networking. The lunch and coffee breaks, talking to workshop leaders, and just chatting with classmates provided me with numerous new contacts. I had read before attending the conference that medical writers are nice people, now I know first-hand that this is true!

I was truly amazed at the level of instruction at the workshops, regardless of the subject matter. In particular, my statistics instructor was able to so clearly convey the material that I left the course feeling ready to apply the concepts discussed right away. The workshops which covered documents such as investigator's brochures and clinical study protocols provided me with a solid foundation to build upon, should I encounter these documents in the future.

While my transition from the laboratory into medical writing is a story which is still unfolding, I now feel confident in moving forward with the knowledge, ideas, and contacts I gained from attending the EMWA conference in Barcelona.

I look forward to seeing you all next time.