

# Connecting medical writers in Portugal through visual communication

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Portugal, the westernmost country in mainland Europe, still experiences a lack of awareness of the medical writing profession.<sup>1</sup> Most medical writers work for contract research organisations (CROs) or in the few pharmaceutical companies that exist in the country. The lack of medical/health communication agencies is another

limitation for medical writers, which is compounded by the fact that these agencies mostly outsource work to freelancers. On top of these constraints, the absence of communication between experts creates additional barriers for emerging opportunities. Thus, there is an urgent need for national communication between medical writing professionals in Portugal. A collaborative group of Portuguese medical writers could tackle these difficulties together through education and networking, thereby developing better specialists and advancing the medical writing profession in Portugal.

We want to share our experience in establishing a Portuguese medical writer group and how visual communications helped us during this process.

*Maria João: I started my career as a medical writer just after I gave up being an exclusive distributor for certain pharmacy products, where I would spend my days sending overdue invoices to my clients. I felt that what I needed was to work for myself, doing something science-related. I started with translations and then moved on to building content and campaigns for a comms agency. At this point, someone told me about EMWA. I quickly became a*

*member, registered in the freelance listing, and started attending conferences and workshops for credits.*

*Alexandra: As I was trying to learn more about the scope of being a medical writer, I realised that in my country, Portugal, there were no organised groups of medical writing professionals. I then met Maria João, who introduced me to EMWA.*

*Maria João: In the meantime, after volunteering with EMWA for a while, I joined the Executive Committee as Public Relations Officer. And then, one day, I met Alexandra.*

*Alexandra: I became an EMWA member in December 2018. Being new in the field, I was anxious to learn from medical writers already settled in the professional arena. But, apart from the EMWA conferences, how could I connect with these professionals and learn from them? I believe networks are a valuable tool for learning and keeping people with the same interests connected. So then Maria João and I decided to create a group of Portuguese medical writers and used visual communications along with social media networks to attract and gather people interested in this career.*



Figure 1. Examples of images produced using Canva and posted on Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn to promote the Medical Writers of Portugal (MWP) group

**Maria João:** We brainstormed for a while, dreamt of building a huge Portuguese medical writers' community, and started assigning tasks to each other. **Alexandra:** I started looking for online software that I could use to produce images that would have an impact on our target audience. I had experience with imaging software like Photoshop and Corel Draw, but nothing is easier or more intuitive than Canva,<sup>2</sup> a user-friendly online design software. With Canva,<sup>2</sup> you can either use one of the more 65,000 templates available or start from scratch using multiple stock images, illustrations, icons, and fonts that are ready to use. We wanted to create an image for the group so, after several attempts, we used Canva to produce a logo for what we called the "Medical Writers of Portugal" (MWP) group. Afterwards, we planned several social media posts, including images with motivational sentences and explaining what a medical writer does. Other images reflected our intentions for the medical writer group (Figure 1).

Posting these images on Instagram, LinkedIn, and Facebook, we rapidly attracted people's attention and gathered a total of about 50 followers (Figure 1). We scheduled a meeting under the MWP banner and, again, used Canva to announce it through social media.

The first meeting was held in Lisbon and connected around 25 participants. We were overwhelmed with the participation! Some of the participants were medical writers working in pharmaceutical companies, CROs, MedComms, or as freelancers; others were new in the field and were just interested in learning about a career in medical writing.

After the meeting, we sent out a Google Forms survey to participants asking for suggestions on what they wanted for the group. The results were collected, and we produced a document using Visme online software (Figure 2).<sup>3</sup>

**Alexandra:** I was used to working with Visme, an online design tool that enables users to produce presentations, infographics, and other visual content. I used this program while I was in academia to create infographics and boost the impact of my presentations.

After the meeting, we sent out a Google-form survey to participants asking for suggestions on what they wanted for the group.



Figure 2. Document produced using the online software Visme to reflect the analysis of the survey sent to the participants after the first meeting of the Medical Writers of Portugal

**Maria João:** Participants reacted positively. A second meeting is now being organised, and we are creating an official Portuguese medical writer group that hopefully will become an association or part of the EMWA Ambassador's Programme. **Alexandra:** Now, we can share experiences, help each other in our daily work, feel there is someone on the other side of the screen, and learn from each other. And visual communications had a significant impact in promoting the gathering of this Portuguese network.

**Conflicts of interest**

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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**Author information**

**Alexandra Sanfins**, who has a PhD in biomedical sciences, has been a professor of cell and molecular biology for more than 15 years. In 2018, she started a journey to become a scientific/medical writer and became a member of EMWA. She finished a master's degree in science communication and earned the multidisciplinary foundation certificate from EMWA. Apart from her academic responsibilities, she is a freelance medical writer always looking to refine her skills as a science communicator.

**Maria João Almeida** has been a Member of the Royal Pharmaceutical Society since 1999 and has 10 years of experience as a freelance medical writer (handling medical communications, scientific advisory boards, and manuscript writing and submissions, among other things). She joined EMWA in 2014 and has held the post of Public Relations Officer since 2017. She is also a yoga and mindfulness practitioner and a mother of three children.