

President's Message

Working from home: What's old is new again



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Dear EMWA friends and colleagues, we have witnessed a sea change in work practices in the last two years with terms like “remote working”, “home-office”, and “work from home” becoming increasingly common parlance. In the September 2022 issue of *Medical Writing* on the theme of a virtual workforce, we present you with different perspectives, challenges, advantages, and predictions on working from home (WFH).

The concept of WFH is not new to the medical writing profession; our industry comprises a large number of freelance consultants for whom WFH is standard practice. Of course, as pandemic restrictions were put into place globally, the only resort to keep businesses running was for the workforce to operate from their residences and since then WFH has become a norm.

Technology has played a large part in facilitating WFH, especially in the medical

writing industry. The almost seamless shift in the practice of office-based working to home-based working was possible primarily due to

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recent technological advances in communication, connectivity, and data storage and transfer. This would have been an impossible achievement a couple of decades back. The curb on human interaction in person was more than adequately compensated by online video conferencing platforms that allowed colleagues, clients, and other stakeholders to meet virtually. High-speed internet and 5G telecommunications ensured that teams stayed connected globally and with access to all digital resources. Cloud-based services enabled storage and sharing of large volumes of digital information. Harnessing

the power of these technologies is what enabled the medical writing industry to not only continue to operate without disruptions throughout global

lockdowns but to also increase its output to match the increase in regulatory submissions and medical communications.

Despite the apparent ease in WFH in the presence of adequate technological support, its practice is not entirely without inconvenience. Setting up an efficient WFH environment requires investment of personal space even when hardware and infrastructure are provided by the employer. The ‘flexi-time’ that WFH cites as an advantage can and does blur the line between work time and personal time, especially for those with young families. WFH can be a lonely experience since it curtails other social aspects of office-working, especially human contact. A number of cultural and social nuances also come into play when it comes to feasibility of WFH. In densely populated countries in Asia with large families cohabiting, it is challenging to apportion a dedicated space in the living quarters, a problem not as common in Europe or America. Moreover, implementing WFH is a massive challenge in the resource-deficient global south where poor connectivity, lack of personal space, and the high cost of building infrastructure act as deterrents.

So what would the future of WFH be as the world limps towards normalcy and pre-pandemic work practices? One certainty is that WFH will be offered more and more as an option to those in the medical writing industry in developed nations; the pandemic revealed how the industry can continue to be prolific even with WFH. Another equally important driver of WFH, at least in developed countries, has been the sustainability initiative. WFH eliminates the need for daily commute to workplaces, thereby reducing the need for fossil fuels, and the burden on public transport infrastructure. If WFH becomes an option, we would all be in a better position to judge whether to avail of it or not.

Happy reading!