Communicating with the public:

Bringing together plain language, patient engagement, inclusive communication, and AI

In 2015, *Medical Writing* published an issue on "Plain language and readability", the first issue to focus on the value and practice of writing in plain language.[1] The issue provided medical communicators with a consolidated view on a more challenging form of communication, one that required the communicator to consider the needs of a very diverse set of readers. The goal: the reader should be able to quickly and easily understand the information provided to them and be able to use that information in their

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healthcare decisions.

Five years after this landmark issue came the issue on "Writing for patients",[2] with a focus on how to apply the principles of plain language communication when developing different types of documents with different purposes and for use in different avenues. This issue explored disparate medical writing domains, such as clinical trial disclosure and reporting, ethics submission, publication planning, translation, health communication, all connected by the principles of plain language communication.

Plain language communication has become a key skill for medical communicators, and rightfully so. Effective plain language is crucial for ensuring that medical information is accessible and understandable to everyone, improving patient outcomes and fostering trust. Articles discussing the application of plain language

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communication in specialised writing domains appear in many issues of *Medical Writing*, especially those themed on medical journalism,[3] open science and open pharma,[4] clinical trials,[5,6] translation,[7] and clinical trial transparency and disclosure.[9-11] Communicating with the public, be it patients, research participants, or anyone seeking health information, is now one of the core activities of the medical writing profession.

Ten years after that first issue on plain language, we are ready for another consolidated look at how the field of communicating with the public has evolved, and what the future entails for the medical writing profession. We are thrilled to present to you in this issue of *Medical Writing*, 11 features that provide historical perspectives and explore new horizons in the realm of communicating with the public from the nuanced viewpoints of the EMA, regulatory writers, patient advocates, patient engagement experts, clinical research organizations, scientific writers, plain language specialists, translators, and visual communicators. The issue covers everything from communicating drug or medical device information to the public, improving patient engagement, practicing inclusive and trustworthy communication, to using artificial intelligence (AI) in communicating health information and clinical research findings.

The EMA has been at the forefront of patient and public communication efforts. As the EMA celebrates its 30th anniversary this year, **Nacho Mbaeliachi** reflects on the evolution of the agency's crowning achievement in transparent public communication, the European Public Assessment Report, and outlines the agency's vision for the future of public communication and patient engagement. This gives us insights into how the EMA plans to improve transparency, accessibility, and engagement to build public trust.

One of the latest initiatives by the EMA to make information about approved drugs easier to access is the electronic Product Information (ePI). **Behtash Bahador et al.** discuss the transition from paper-based product information to the ePI, the implications of this transition, and how the ePI can be further evolved to benefit different stakeholders. Medical writers will be involved in shaping the future of the ePI, so understanding the strategies for creating accessible and user-friendly ePI that meets the needs of patients, clinicians, and regulators is paramount.

In the medical device sector, manufacturers are now required to submit the Summary of Safety and Clinical Performance (SSCP), a document introduced by the European Medical Device Regulation (MDR 2017/745). The SSCP is meant to clearly and concisely communicate a medical device's safety and performance to healthcare professionals *and patients*. The SSCP is intended for two audiences, and with that comes many challenges. **Katharina Friedrich** outlines the challenges faced when writing the SSCP sections meant for patients and how to address them effectively using plain language principles – a must-read for medical writers in the medical device space!

Patient and public involvement and engagement in clinical trials leads to useful trial design, efficient trial conduct, and clear reporting. **Diana Daniel et al.** discuss a patient-centric writing strategy that medical

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writers can use to support patient engagement activities across the clinical trial lifecycle, from protocol writing to results dissemination. When it comes to clinical trial enrolment specifically, **Ekaterina Bulaeva** and **Amalia Iljasova** explain how patient-centric landing pages can be used to address challenges in trial enrolment. Landing pages with clear and accessible information have the potential to increase enrolment and improve patient engagement. Taking the broader view on patient engagement, **Fatima Auwal et al.** encourage medical writers to think holistically and develop a unified approach to patient engagement, bringing together medicine development and research communication, and thereby help develop and maintain meaningful and sustainable patient engagement practices. They base their insightful recommendations on their ongoing research efforts at King's College London in the patient engagement field. For medical writers, the article underscores the importance of establishing evidence-based patient engagement practices.

Effective patient and public involvement and engagement in healthcare is built upon inclusive communication. Inclusive communication ensures that everyone, regardless of their background, can access and understand medical information, making healthcare equitable. **Ana Sofia Correia** discusses the crucial role medical translators play in improving patient safety and equitable healthcare access. She also provides an actionable translation strategy that can make language services sustainable, efficient, and impactful. Also, translating complex medical concepts into well-designed visual aids, such as infographics and diagrams, can help empower patients and the public to make informed decisions about their health. But visual aids remain underused! **Helena Jambor et al.** walk us through the history of visual communication in medicine, bringing us to the present and potential application of visual communication in clinical development and clinical care. They provide excellent (downloadable) PowerPoint templates that medical communicators can use to create visual Clinical Study Report synopsis and graphical abstracts.

Communicating with the public effectively is a trust-building exercise. Our word choices can either build or break trust. In this vein, **Crystal Herron** argues for choosing language that shows our respect, empathy, compassion, and kindness for people who participate in research, in order to preserve their autonomy and humanity. Medical communicators can also build trust by ensuring the accuracy and transparency of health information provided to the public. But if they were to use AI to generate health information, how would the public perceive it? Medical communicators can learn about the public's concerns and the factors influencing the public's trust regarding AI-generated health information in the article by **Jumana Ashkanani**, where she presents the findings of her Master's project on public perception of AI-generated health information.

> While the landscape of medical communication is ever-evolving, effectively communicating medical and health information to the public remains our immutable mission.

Without a doubt, AI is revolutionising medical writing; however, guidelines for its use are still being developed and discussed. In this issue, we are delighted to offer the latest guidance on how AI should be used to create Lay Summaries of Clinical Trial Results. This guidance document, by **Kimbra Edwards** on behalf of the working group, is the result of a collaboration between experts from over 15 organisations in the US and the EU, including industry, academia, and a patient-focused nonprofit. It provides excellent recommendations for AI implementation, highlighting the necessity of human oversight and expertise. For medical writers, this pragmatic and insightful paper underscores the importance of combining AI with human input to achieve high standards in accuracy, transparency, and compliance, whilst offering practical advice for how to approach the use of AI in this space.

Though the landscape of medical communication is ever-evolving, effectively communicating medical and health information to the public remains our immutable mission. We hope that you enjoy reading this issue as much as we have enjoyed working with the authors to compile the latest thinking in this area. We thank everyone involved for their continued support of EMWA, and the medical writing profession.

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