

# Incoming President's Message

## Embracing change and building connection: Reflections from Riga

Dear Friends, Colleagues, and EMWA Members,

**A**s I write this message, I'm still energised by the exceptional EMWA Spring Conference we experienced together in Riga, (see picture at right). Four intensive days delivered an outstanding programme of 45 workshops, a symposium, four expert seminars, EMWA's Get into Medical Writing session for new medical writers, the Freelance Business Forum, and an update on The CORE Reference Project, which will celebrate its 10th anniversary in 2026.

While virtual events serve their purpose, there is something irreplaceable about in-person connections – those spontaneous conversations between sessions, meaningful exchanges over coffee and a walking tour, and candid insights from peers that simply don't translate in a virtual world.

I was particularly struck by the energy and enthusiasm of our many first-time EMWA members and conference attendees, and their positive experiences with the welcoming nature of the EMWA family reinforced what makes our community so special. This truly exemplifies that EMWA is by members, for members – a community where experienced professionals genuinely invest in supporting newcomers and each other.

With this in mind, I am already looking forward to next year's EMWA Spring Conference in Barcelona.

### My journey to the presidency

It was in Riga at the annual meeting that I transitioned from President-Elect to President, and this vibrant conference sets the scene for my 12-month tenure. My first conference was EMWA's 2016 Spring Conference in Munich.

I was invited as a medical and scientific publisher to present and was immediately struck by the open and welcoming family that is EMWA. Despite not being a medical writer, I found that I and other publishing colleagues were able to bring an important perspective to help advance the profession of medical writing and medical communications.



When then President-Elect Sarah Tilly invited me to apply for this role, I felt both honoured and privileged, knowing the wealth of experienced medical writers in our organisation. The transition for me from President-Elect to President has been both humbling and inspiring, building on the exceptional foundation laid by Sarah's strong and inspiring leadership.

I am committed to following in her footsteps and continuing the excellent work of our organisation.

### Acknowledging those who made this journey possible

I would like to thank the people who made my EMWA journey possible.

Slávka Baróniková, our Conference Director, originally invited me to present at the EMWA 2016 Spring Conference in Munich. Slávka has made a significant contribution to EMWA over the past 11 years and greatly encouraged me to support the organisation in whatever ways I can. Her dedication to creating exceptional conference experiences has been truly inspirational.

Outgoing EMWA President Sarah Tilly (2024-25), expertly guided me through my President-Elect year and has set a high bar for my presidential term. Thank you, Sarah, for your mentorship, strategic vision, and the countless hours you dedicated to advancing our profession during particularly challenging times.

Maria Koltowska-Häggström, EMWA President 2023-24, worked with me on conference symposia and gave me valuable



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insight into how to create impactful and practical conference experiences for EMWA members. Her innovative approach to restructuring our Expert Seminar Series has had lasting benefits for our community.

Former EMWA Treasurer John Dixon deserves special recognition for his good humour and tireless, detailed work to help EMWA through a difficult transition of Head Office to our excellent new partner, CJ Association Management. His financial stewardship during this period was exemplary.

And thank you to many others who make my interactions with EMWA a real pleasure, including all our dedicated volunteers who contribute so generously to our mission.

### Strategic progress and achievements

It has been my privilege to join the Executive Committee as EMWA's first President-Elect with a medical and scientific publishing background. During my President-Elect year, we navigated particularly challenging times while making significant progress on our strategic initiatives.

Our Special Interest Groups (SIGs) continue to flourish, having grown from our first Pharmacovigilance SIG established in 2015 to nine active SIGs today. Our newest addition, the Visual Communications SIG, chaired by Judit Mészáros, exemplifies how these focus groups bring together EMWA members who share common interests and collaborate on topics shaping the future of medical writing. All SIGs and their dedicated volunteers actively contribute to EMWA through journal articles, webinars, workshops, seminars, and conference sessions.

Our Local EMWA Groups (LEG) in Italy and Poland have been instrumental in supporting existing regional members and actively recruiting new ones. Last year, in addition to LEG-hosted hubs, EMWA organised eight regional networking hubs, attracting 243 attendees collectively. Our post-event survey revealed that

networking was participants' primary motivation for attending, with 50% being existing EMWA members and 13% of non-members indicating they were very likely to join.

### Fostering strategic partnerships

A key component of EMWA's 2023–27 strategic plan focuses on fostering existing relationships and building new ones to drive inter-organisational initiatives and strengthen partnerships with regulatory and associated agencies. We've engaged in several discussions about potential collaborations, most recently with TOPRA (The Organisation for Professionals in Regulatory Affairs).

To better focus on this objective, we've implemented a more systematic approach to identifying valuable partner organisations through a two-tiered framework ranging from information exchange to educational collaborations. Moving forward, we will ensure all collaborations deliver clear benefits to EMWA members, develop practical and sustainable implementation processes, and establish metrics to evaluate success.

### Embracing technological innovation

We established an EMWA AI Working Group comprising Sarah Tilly, Namrata Singh, Slávka Baróniková, and myself, with each SIG appointing a dedicated AI liaison. Our activities included a full-day AI Symposium in Valencia, follow-up webinars throughout the year, and virtual conference sessions featuring publisher perspectives on AI with input from editors at *The Lancet* and *JAMA*. Our ongoing aim is to empower EMWA members to be better informed and more confident when discussing AI with research authors, agencies, and clients as this field continues to evolve.

### Medical Writing

Drawing on my academic publishing background, I've worked closely with Journal Editor



**Sarah Tilly, Maria Koltowska-Häggström, Martin Delahunty**



### EMWA Executive Committee

Raquel Billiones and Web Manager Andrew Balkin to ensure our official journal, *Medical Writing*, continues to provide members with a valuable and practical resource.

We aim to transition *Medical Writing* from its current print and basic online format to an exclusively digital publication. The journal landing page on the website will also be reworked to minimise disruption.

These plans align with EMWA's 2023–27 Strategic Plan focusing on sustainability initiatives and enhancing membership value.

### Recognising our community

I extend my sincere thanks to all our conference organisers and Head Office staff who work tirelessly to deliver exceptional experiences for our members. Special recognition goes to our Education Officers and the entire EMWA Professional Development Committee, as well as all our workshop leaders who contribute their expertise to advance professional development within our community.

Finally, I would like to thank all members of the previous Executive Committee who have welcomed me and made this transition seamless. It's important to remember that despite it feeling many times like a full-time job, all 12 members of the EMWA Executive Committee are volunteers.

Thank you also to Somsuvro Basu, the outgoing Honorary Secretary, for his humility and great humour over many years in his volunteering for EMWA. We are in a much better position thanks to his organisational work.

Thanks also to Diana Ribeiro, outgoing Public Relations Officer, whose tireless support and keen eye for member communications and building community online has made a huge difference.

I look forward to supporting our experienced Executive Committee and collaborating with our new members: Katrin Zaragoza Dörr (President-Elect), Sarah Choudhury (Honorary Secretary), Johanna Chester (Press Relations Officer) and Wendy Kingdom and Julie Cooper (Co-Treasurers).

I am confident that as a strong team with diverse skills and competencies, we will continue to grow the association for the benefit and professional development of EMWA members.

### Looking forward

As we move forward, I am committed to upholding EMWA's values and mission of promoting the medical communication profession and impacting the industry positively. My expertise and passion for medical publications, combined with the collective strength of our Executive Committee and dedicated volunteers, positions us well to drive the organisation forward and ensure its continued growth and influence.

I look forward to serving as your President and working collaboratively with all stakeholders to advance our profession, strengthen our community, and deliver meaningful value to every EMWA member. Together, we will continue to build on our proud tradition of excellence in medical writing and communications.