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# NEWSLETTER

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Chapter of the American Medical Writers Association

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**Fall/1995**

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### **From Baltimore to Berlin**

The AMWA Meeting in Baltimore was the best turn out yet by EMWA in the USA. We had 27 members in attendance, which may not appear much out of a total of over 800 conference participants, but it's approximately 16% of the current EMWA membership, and if 16% of AMWA members in the USA come to Berlin next March, we'll be swamped.

One of the good things about the AMWA Conference was the opportunity to meet people who do the same job as I do. Nowhere else do you find such a concentration of medical writers in one place. It's always interesting to find out more about the variation in the ways that medical writers work in different companies. Some of us serve mainly as medical editors, while others produce clinical reports in their entirety, starting with the protocol and the raw data. With your help, I would like to carry out a survey of the different job requirements of our members, and publish it in the Newsletter. I'll be contacting some of you early next year, to ask you to write a brief description of what a medical writer does in your company.

You should all have received registration forms for the EMWA Conference in Berlin. Ben Young, the EMWA president-elect, is organizing the Conference, and he would like to get an idea of the numbers who wish to attend. We would therefore appreciate it if you could let us know as soon as possible if you'll be able to come. The conference workshops are limited in size, and places will be allocated on a first-come-first-served basis; so get your applications in early to avoid disappointment.

Finally, I'd like to give a brief update on the progress of the AMWA International Task Force. Although it would be premature to present the details at this time, the Task Force has reached consensus on the recommendations that it would like to bring to the AMWA Executive Committee at its next meeting in January. If the Committee approves our proposals, and we are very hopeful, then AMWA will be taking a major step forward in its recognition of the international nature of its membership, and will be laying down a solid basis for its expansion world-wide. The changes will not affect the standing of members of EMWA within AMWA. A minor step that has already been taken was to mail the registration documentation for the Baltimore Conference to members outside the USA 1 week before mailing to destinations within the USA. This was done because many of the required core-curriculum workshops fill very rapidly, and international mail is often much slower than national mail. AMWA has also changed the guidelines governing approval of new core-curriculum workshops and workshop leaders, and will allow approvals to be granted without workshops having to be presented at AMWA Meetings in the USA. This means that we will be able to provide more core-curriculum workshops at the EMWA Conference in Berlin.

We plan eventually to create an extensive educational program within Europe, to allow EMWA members to complete the core curriculum without having to travel to the USA. This will take time, but it has taken AMWA 55 years to

reach its current stature, and EMWA has already come a long way in the 5 years since it began.

I hope you all have a peaceful festive season.

John Aitken  
EMWA President



The annual conference of the American Medical Writers Association hosted 811 registrants this year in the harbour city of Baltimore, Maryland. The large international contingent which attended the meeting was invited by Eli Lilly to share a moonlight harbour tour and dinner.

The days were long, composed of plenary sessions and workshops, yet there was always time to socialise and enjoy the trip. Topics for the meeting symposia focused on timely issues of concern to members. Some of the European attendees have contributed brief impressions and synopses of sessions in which they participated.

### **Sentence Structure and Patterns**

The purpose of this workshop was to make us aware of how sentence construction influences meaning. Guy Whitehead covered a wide range of topics related to sentence structure, including aggregation and

separation, verb force, dangling modifiers, predication, stress points, rhetorical pattern, isolation, suspect words, and much more. (If you want to find out what many of these mean, you'll have to do the workshop.) I found that he tried to pack far too much information into the 3 hours available, and I just couldn't assimilate it all. I certainly came away from the workshop much more appreciative of the importance of sentence structure, but many of the details escaped me. The hand outs were mainly copies of the overheads, which I find often meaningless when you look at the again weeks later. In summary, this was a fascinating topic, well conveyed, but too much to take in.

John Aitken

#### **English Usage and Abusage**

This workshop, led by Edith Schwager (known to all as "Dear Edie" in the AMWA Newsletter), was for me one of the highlights of the conference. Edith set up a rapport with the delegates immediately with her gentle sense of humour, then led us through a treasure trove of classic editorial blunders and grammatical mistakes which we have all made at some time in our writing activities. She made very good use of one of the golden rules of teaching, that people learn best when they are amused in the process. Two examples I particularly liked were "Today the Pope beautified a caramelised nun" and "Beethoven's Erotica Symphony". Thank you, "Dear Edie", for a most enjoyable three hours instruction!

Philip Cooper

#### **Newsletter Production**

As readers can readily see from this issue of the EMWA newsletter, I left this workshop inspired and anxious to try suggestions from the course leader, Patricia Schumann. The three-hour course covered the basic steps in newsletter production. Ms Schumann pointed out that a well-designed newsletter produced on a shoe-string budget can achieve excellence, whereas an elaborate, expensive publication that fails to reach its audience would not. If I get carried away with my newly acquired knowledge, someone please let me know.

Janice Beck

#### **Writing Abstracts**

This workshop, led by Flo Witte was designed for the "new" writer and provided ample time to review different forms of abstracts while allowing experience with editing and composing original abstracts.

#### **The Growing Plague of Abbreviations and How to Deal with Them**

Edward J. Huth led this shorter course (1 ½ hours). He provided a good rule of thumb for any paper: no more than 3 abbreviations. He noted that abbreviations are often used as a badge of being an insider. This has led to an alphabet soup of coined abbreviations which are "proof" of being in the "in crowd". This leads to confusion when reading a document with much leafing back and forth. He closed with the thought to always remember one's audience in order to provide ease of reading.

### **Impressions of a new recruit**

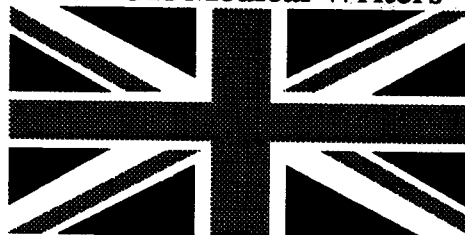
“Right,” they said, “you’re a medical writer now so you had better go off to AMWA and learn how to be one. Oh! And watch out for the President of the European branch. . . he’s Scottish!” “Thanks,” I thought, “15 years in scientific research and now they are going to teach me how to write papers.”

So I went, and I did learn, and I did meet the President of the European branch. . . sorry, EMWA! I attended two core courses, “How to prepare the Medical paper”, and “Tables and Graphs”. I was pleased to realise that I had been following the basic rules during my years in academic research, but I also have to admit that I learned a few things as well. Perhaps that was the main point of the courses, not simply to reiterate the obvious, but to indicate why they should be obvious and when they sometimes are not. Apart from that the FDA taught us all about safe sex in the most hilarious way imaginable, and I had an introduction to the wide variety of product generated by AMWA members, as well as meeting a bunch of great people.

So it was a worthwhile introduction to AMWA, and I was sufficiently impressed that I am looking forward to EMWA next year in Berlin (having discussed it at great length with the organiser until the wee hours in the hotel bar). . . . and the President? Well, ask him about beers served by girls in bikinis, or Russian taxi-drivers who do not know where they are going, or receipts, or cycling shorts. . . . .

Keith Veitch

### **New UK Medical Writers**



### **Networking Group**

Calling all Medical Writers working in the United Kingdom. Would you be interested in taking part in a UK Networking Group? The purpose of such a group would be to share ideas and knowledge, to enhance the profile of Medical Writing as a specialist function, and to facilitate professional networking. There are a number of possibilities for organising such a group, so I would like to invite Medical Writers from the UK to a preliminary meeting at the next EMWA conference in Berlin in March 1996. I thought the best time would be following the afternoon workshops on Thursday March 7, at 5.30 p.m. for about 30 minutes. We should meet in the Hotel Kroneflügel where most of the conference delegates will be staying. Look out for a flyer enclosed in the conference mailing for confirmation of the time and venue. In the meantime, if anyone has any bright ideas/suggestions, I would be delighted to hear from you.

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## **FIRST DRAFT BLOOPERS**

*Ben Young*

Stranger than fiction! These mind-bogglers really “happened”! And they probably would have gone on to signature, had not the editor’s eagle eye opened widely at their sight. For your further enlightenment, I have noted my initial reaction to each and every one of these pearls. But, first, a word to the wise: Never, but never get caught producing stuff like this.

- Only two patients were reported to have taken excessive doses. In neither case was the dose excessive, and neither experienced any untoward events.  
*One of us is lying and it isn't me.*
- Pain, the next highest frequency event, was either non-specific or localised to various sites.  
*First it was adverse events, then serious adverse events, and now we're supposed to write up all the frequency events? "Localised to various sites" indeed. I quit.*
- In rats the pharmacokinetics were almost similar to mice.  
*Disgusting. Has someone been injecting mice into rats, or what? There ought to be a law.*
- Unless otherwise specified, [this issue] will not be discussed in this discussion.  
*Yes. Quite. Not unmeaningless, I would say.*
- For the short pre-treated patients, the patient’s participation in the study was then considered completed.  
*An outrage! The vertically challenged get to go home early while the tall pre-treated patients have to stay in the study.*
- Twenty-nine of these [quite a few] adverse event withdrawals were related to deaths on study.  
*Well, that's the last time we recruit any adverse events in our studies. They just leave the study early, and their relatives keep dropping like flies!*
- In a comparison of patients treated for a shorter duration compared with those who were treated longer, no increase [ . . . ] was seen in the longer treated patients.  
*Wince. Cringe. Shudder.*
- These dose levels are categorised into low, medium, high, and ultra high dose intensity.  
*The creator of this bit will empty the latrines for no fewer than 2 consecutive weeks. Make that 4 weeks.*
- Subjects were treated from one to seven days a week with varying intervals between periods.  
*Want to see a grown statistician cry?*
- There is no experience of the use of [this drug] in the use of children.  
*Call the cops.*

## Job Opportunity

PPD Gabbay a leading CRO, with European Headquarters in Southampton UK are looking for experienced Medical Writers to work in a growing group of medical writers and regulatory staff. Our clients include a number of leading pharmaceutical companies. We have produced a number of key expert reports, publications, clinical study reports, regulatory submissions and projects specifically designed to the clients' needs.

This position offers an excellent opportunity for someone experienced in the Medical Writing field to further develop their skills and experience. We are looking for someone who has a background in clinical research. They must be keen, enthusiastic, have good communication skills and handling of English, written and oral. Knowledge of other languages would be useful, though not essential. They must be self-starters, able to work on their own, but also be part of a team. An eye for detail is an absolutely essential quality. They must be computer literate and familiar with on-line literature searches. Experience with Word, Word Perfect, Lotus 123 and the Internet would be preferred.

Any interested applicants should write to:

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The holiday season is upon us! It's that time of year - time to ring out the old and bring in the new year. It's a time to look back over the past 365 days with hopefully few regrets and look forward optimistically to the unfolding events of 1996. The next year will provide challenge and change and opportunity for every individual. The production group here at SmithKline Beecham sends best wishes for a safe, happy holiday season and a healthy and gratifying new year to all our readers.



All letters to the Editor are appreciated. We would be grateful for any ideas and/or contributions for future articles. Announcements of a personal nature that anyone would like to share would be enjoyed by other readers.

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