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Out on Our Own

Welcome readers,

Back in 2016, the Out on Our Own editors reached out to groups in European countries who had established informal medical writers' gatherings. It was great to see that groups had appeared in Germany, France, the UK, and the Netherlands. Here, I asked the Berlin group and the Netherlands group to give us a recap on their gatherings. Paul Walufa, original author back in 2016 and based in Berlin, provides a summary of the advantages of

these groups. Maya Raghunandan, who is still in the lab as a post-doc but being tempted by a medical writing career, gives her view on the gatherings that are taking place in the Netherlands. Lastly, Viviana Moroso offers a different perspective on networking, within the Erasmus programme. She explains how it's not all about students, and that the Erasmus programme provides a great opportunity for young entrepreneurs; and medical writing is fast becoming a hot topic. So, if you're a medical writer sitting at

home as a freelancer or home-working, or even employed and keen to meet other medical writers, search social media platforms like LinkedIn and Facebook to see if there's an informal gathering near you. The gatherings offer a supportive networking opportunity where people with similar interests can share ideas and experiences or ask questions. And if you can't find a group, why not establish one and let us know how it goes. Happy networking!

Laura A. Kehoe

Informal gatherings: A perspective from the Berlin and Brandenburg group

Positive from the start

Following the introduction of the concept of informal gatherings as a way to expand networking activities among freelancers; we formed the Berlin and Brandenburg group. Our first meeting was on the July 14, 2016. The turnout was great, and the meeting proved not only to be an opportunity to establish new contacts but also to reunite with former colleagues. The general feeling was that this was an opportunity many colleagues had wanted to have, and it was finally here with us!

A supportive lot

Our group is composed of writers with a wide range of experience, a blend which has proved to be an asset. Through discussions, colleagues have benefited a great deal from each other. This has not only been restricted to sharing information and knowledge on how to tackle issues related to writing from a freelance point of view but has also extended to supporting each other in business through referrals and providing contacts from whom newbies could find placements. In light that some members have switched to regular employment, whenever their old clients contact them for freelance jobs, the information is shared in the group's mail list.

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From freelancers' gathering to medical writers' meeting

From the first meeting until today, both freelancers and colleagues in regular employment attend the informal gatherings. For the sake of inclusivity and to adapt to our situation, we as a group, decided to officially transform our

informal gathering from a freelance group to a general medical writers' informal gathering group. This was to ensure that everyone felt welcome. Additionally, we saw it as a way for freelancers to get business and contacts from colleagues in regular employment. Having the two groups together was an opportunity to exploit establishing reliable business relations between the freelancers and their colleagues in regular employment.



Point of contact on professional issues

Having a group account on LinkedIn (<https://www.linkedin.com/groups/8553972/>) has enabled members to support others wanting to get into the medical writing field as well as those who wish to get information on training to further their medical writing knowledge. The possibility to have face-to-face meetings through informal gatherings has, in addition, provided opportunities to meet with such colleagues not only to continue with the conversation but also to provide an opportunity for the new members to network and to know their colleagues in Berlin and its environs.

Informal but still professional

Our gatherings also provide opportunities to discuss issues about the profession as a whole. We have had very insightful discussions on a wide range of topics, ranging from new regulations in the industry, how to deal with expensive paid-

access published articles and databases, and sharing of business, just to name a few. Discussions also take place on our LinkedIn page in the form of posts and updates.

In addition, we use the gatherings to encourage colleagues to join EMWA in order to advance their knowledge in medical writing and interact with other medical writers at an international level.

Merely an opportunity to get out of routine

The informal meetings have provided an occasional chance for medical writers to break away from the home-work-home routine. This is even more beneficial to those in home-based settings whether as freelancers or simply remote workers in regular employment. Medical writing is such a demanding career with many high-pressure moments, and endless deadlines make it at times difficult for one to get out of their routine. The socialising aspect of our meetings

has been refreshing and quite enjoyable. Many times, we have ended up listening to in-depth and interesting talks like the scientific aspects of winemaking and history of Berlin from a totally different perspective; topics which are far from medical writing but enriching in their way.

Conclusion

Looking back, it has been a rewarding and fulfilling experience to be part of the informal gathering organising team. As a group, we strive to meet quarterly to continue providing an avenue to network, unwind and share professional information as medical writers in Berlin and Brandenburg, Germany. To know the exact dates of our next meeting, kindly access our LinkedIn page and feel free to join us in more of our gatherings to come.

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The SciMed Writers Network: Fostering local medical writers' camaraderie in the Netherlands

While hopping between continents for different academic jobs, I have observed a new trend: a global lack of scientific awareness, varying from anti-vaccination rallies to climate change denial. Is this really the world we live in? And I guess this is what led me to start science blogging: the feeling that I have the responsibility to effectively communicate science and spread scientific awareness. Blogging has also led me to other projects, including some medical writing and editing – all of which I have really enjoyed alongside my research. But would I like to write as a career? Before dropping my pipette and picking up a laptop for good – I wanted to learn more about what “medical writing” really meant.

I knew that having a solid professional network would be an integral part of the job search process and could probably also help me break into the field. To explore my options, I joined EMWA and connected with some members face-to-face and online. Every EMWA member I spoke to highly recommended the bi-annual EMWA meetings. It is indeed a great way to meet people, but the meetings are only held twice a year, and I knew that I would likely only stay in touch with other members online.



From left to right: Gabriela Plucińska, Jackie Johnson, and Mariella Franker – Organisers of The SciMed network

I wanted to also connect with a local professional network. This would make it possible to grab a coffee sometime with experienced writers. And

that's how I stumbled upon the Netherlands SciMed Writers Network (SMWN).

I'm told that the idea for a local Netherlands-



Organiser Sally Hill conducts her session on writing tips for medical writers, while the workshop attendees take notes.

based networking group all started at the EMWA Barcelona Conference where three fellow EMWA members – Gabriela Plucińska, Jackie Johnson, and Mariella Franker – brainstormed over Spanish tapas about having a structured way of staying in touch with their ‘virtual’ colleagues and connecting with others in the local medical communication, pharma and biotech industries. Shortly thereafter, the trio decided to organise a drink and a bite at a local café in Amsterdam. Though very informal, this was a great success with 14 people attending. At this first meeting, they recruited another organiser, Sally Hill, an experienced writer and volunteer for other groups in the Netherlands. Together, they set the wheels in motion for the Netherlands SciMed Writers Network’s first workshop.

Interactive, informative, and fun meetings

To my surprise, when I joined the online Facebook group (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/2058710307712882/>), there were already nearly 60 members. Therefore, I was quick to sign up for a place at the first live workshop on *Storytelling in Science*, held at the public library in Amsterdam in October 2018. I had heard about it on the LinkedIn (<https://www.linkedin.com/company/scimed-writers-network/>) and Facebook groups, and there was a lot of interest from the other members.

The event started with a session given by Frederike Schmitz titled “Storytelling in Science Communication”. Frederike explained to us, “If you want facts to resonate with your audience, you’re better off telling them a story. But how do you start? First, you have to know your audience.”

This is easy to say, but harder to act upon, which is why Frederike got us standing up and practising elements of theatre improvisation, in order to get us thinking about connecting with our audience.

The next session, led by Sally Hill, highlighted some useful writing tips that were simple and could help make text more readable. Of course, there was plenty of time for networking and interacting with other writers over coffee. All in all, it was a great afternoon, and I learned a lot! After attending the event, I felt invigorated – thanks to an excellent platform to communicate freely with like-minded peers.

Structured yet informal setting

What stands out the most to me about this network is the structured yet informal nature. The frank and casual interactions during the event allowed me to be more myself and less nervous than I usually feel at such gatherings. It was fantastic to meet people from such diverse backgrounds in the group: from fresh graduates to experienced medical writers. It is also nice to see such a mix of careers and companies represented. Some attendees were freelance writers, and others worked for local companies, many of which I had not previously heard of.

New colleagues and opportunities

Although it’s still in the early days, I think the SMWN will surely grow. Since the first networking event, I’ve been able to keep in touch with other members via the active Facebook and LinkedIn groups. Here, the members regularly

share information on potential writing opportunities from their respective networks. This also provides a great platform for seeking expert advice for those venturing into a new aspect of medical writing.

Sally Hill agreed: “I’m really enjoying being part of this network and meeting other medical writers as well as young scientists thinking of transitioning out of academia. Since writing is not an obvious career path for people with science qualifications, the network is an excellent way of hearing more about it.” Even for the professional medical writers in the group, networking continues to be an indispensable resource for staying employed and learning about new publishing mediums.

When describing the goal of the group, Jackie said, “the goal is to connect med writers and other related professionals in the Netherlands and surrounding areas. We are not a business, and we are not looking for profits from our events. We just have a genuine interest to have skill sharing events and meet other like-minded professionals in our country.”

What’s next?

The organisers have been conducting regular polls in the Facebook group to check what discussions and workshops would be the most beneficial for future sessions. Following a more informal networking meet-up in January, they are currently organising a spring workshop in May on the theme “Medical Writing as a Career”.

It has been inspiring to meet fellow medical writers face-to-face and talk about the day-to-day of medical and scientific writing, similar to what might happen in a real office setting. This local group is already helping to create new business opportunities and forge new friendships. So, I recommend that if you are thinking of starting your own local medical writing meet-ups – go for it!

Acknowledgements

Thank you to Jackie Johnson and Sally Hill for help drafting and editing this article. Thank you to the SMWN organisers for the invitation to write this article.

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The Erasmus programme Not only about students, new entrepreneurs can benefit too

Since I first moved to the Netherlands in March 2007 for my master's internship, I was asked many times "are you an Erasmus student?". No, I was not. But I got the feeling that the Erasmus programme was the most popular way to move around Europe to study, train, and get new experiences as a young student.

Now, 12 years later, after my third move to yet another European country, and shortly after starting my own medical writing and editing business, I was asked: "Do you want to join the Erasmus programme?" My first thought, of course, was that I am too old to take part. But I was wrong because this specific Erasmus has nothing to do with my actual age, but rather with the age of my business. It turns out I should not only associate "Erasmus" with the world of students and universities. This is an opportunity for new entrepreneurs who plan to start a business or have started their own business in the past 3 years.

Briefly, the Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs is a cross-border exchange programme that gives

new or aspiring entrepreneurs the chance to learn from experienced entrepreneurs running small businesses in other participating countries. The exchange of experience takes place during a stay with the experienced entrepreneur, which helps the new entrepreneur acquire the skills needed to run a small firm. The host benefits from fresh perspectives on his/her business and gets the opportunities to cooperate with foreign partners or learn about new markets. The stay is partly financed by the European Commission and can have a duration from 1 to 6 months. This and much more information can be found at the website www.erasmus-entrepreneurs.eu/.

But don't worry, you don't have to plan everything alone. You will get help from a "local contact point", who will guide you through the experience from the very early steps. You can find all available contact points on the website too. Also, on YouTube you can find several short reports of successful Erasmus experiences in different fields.

Since I am now located in a rather remote area

in the North of Sweden (Luleå), where I have no concrete opportunities to learn from other businesses or experienced entrepreneurs, this seems a great option to start with the right foot.

My "local contact point" told me from the beginning that the field of medical writing has been rather uncommon within the Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs programme until now. Well, I thought, maybe if more of us, EMWA members, know about this programme, many more opportunities will open up in the near future! A chance for both young and experienced entrepreneurs to exchange knowledge and ideas, to train and maybe create precious collaborations.

Let's hope that from now on medical writers become a much more popular category in the Erasmus programme!

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Upcoming issues of **Medical Writing**



September 2019:

Trends in medical writing

The medical writing industry is growing and evolving at a fast pace, and we need to keep up with the trends. From public disclosure to global medical writing, find everything you need to know in this issue.

Guest Editor: Somsuvru Basu

The deadline for feature articles is June 10, 2019.



December 2019:

Artificial intelligence & digital health

Technological innovation is overtaking all industries, and medicine is no exception. Artificial intelligence and digital health are growing trends. As medical writers, we must understand and communicate these advances and know how they will affect our profession.

Guest Editors: Evguenia Alechine and Martin Delahunty

The deadline for feature articles is September 9, 2019.



March 2020:

The data economy

In an increasingly digitised world, data are economic assets that are becoming the lifeblood of the world economy. Medical writers need to know how the data economy affects the development of healthcare products and should understand which big data repositories are reliable, the specialized data analysis approaches needed, and the issues around big data protection.

Guest Editor: Raquel Billiones and Sam Hamilton

The deadline for feature articles is December 10, 2019.

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If you have ideas for themes or would like to discuss any other issues, please write to mew@emwa.org.



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