



Winner of the Geoff Hall Scholarship Essay Competition

The Geoff Hall Scholarships are given in honour of a former president of EMWA. Geoff was a very special person, an extremely valued member of EMWA, and a very good friend to many EMWA members. He firmly believed that the future of EMWA lies in our new and potential members, and so it's a very fitting legacy that we have the scholarship awards in his memory.

The scholarships are awarded annually on the basis of an essay competition, and the title of this year's essay was "The medical writer: partner or servant?" This year the scholarships committee decided to award only one scholarship, to Abbie Fearon.

Abbie received her PhD in tumour biology in

FOR CORRESPONDENCE



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2015 from Barts Cancer Institute, in London, England. The research focused on the dissection of drug resistance mechanisms in endometrial and breast cancer. She then moved to Switzerland to take up a role as a postdoctoral research scientist at the Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule Zürich (ETH), a science, technology, engineering and mathematics university in Switzerland, and Abbie is still there today. At the ETH, Abbie works on delineating the mech-

anisms involved in liver repair and regeneration. She also has a real love of science communication and is now focused on combining her research career with scientific writing for the general public.

Abbie's winning essay is presented opposite, and we wish her the very best at the start of her very promising medical writing career. For those of you inspired to pick up your laptop, the title for the next essay competition is "How would you go about identifying a predatory journal?" The submission deadline is September 30. More details are available on the EMWA website.

I hope to read your essays soon!

**Bestest,
Lisa**



The medical writer: Partner or servant?

From an academic who took communication for granted

I'm an academic scientist. I work in a lab and often forget about the world beyond the fume hood. As a molecular biologist, it's easy to become consumed with the behaviour of your cells without worrying too much about what the outside world thinks of your work. Well, that's not completely true; we're always worrying about what fellow scientists would make of our findings and the questions they'd ask if peer reviewing our papers. What the average person on the street would think of our data is not usually at the top of our agendas. However, one evening away from the lab, whilst still a PhD student, it was forced to the top of mine.

Over a beer, a partner of a friend of mine casually dropped into conversation that he would never give money to a cancer research charity. His explanation was simple: these charities have already received lots of donations and have achieved nothing. Giving them any more money was simply a waste. In his opinion, my days toiling in the lab could be much better spent elsewhere. As a cancer researcher, I was a little annoyed (to put it mildly), but then, after talking with him, I came to realise that I was part of the problem.

The missing link

I was an enthusiastic scientist who clearly loved her work, but I obviously wasn't explaining its significance. It's difficult to really accurately explain complex concepts and ideas in an easy to understand way. It doesn't help that scientists rarely receive any training in science communication. It could be argued that including such

training as a matter of course in a scientist's education would be beneficial across the board. Perhaps some of us would be more successful at getting those precious research grants if we could explain what we do a little better.

Research is both time consuming and expensive. Really expensive. How can we expect people to give generously to donation tins and fun runs to pay for our next experiment when we haven't explained why it is so important? There's also the small matter of making sure governments understand the relevance of basic research to society and so keep giving money to institutions to fund it. Bridging that gap is essential.

Enter the medical writer

Since that conversation in the pub many years ago, articles explaining new research discoveries are becoming more widespread in general publications. The importance of a communicator who can take technical language and make it engaging to the lay reader is of paramount importance. Here, the medical writer can take the reins.

The diversity of roles in this profession reflects the diversity of instances in which research and big data need to be communicated. These range from explaining the results of clinical trials to patients as well as doctors, to explaining how a charity's funds were used to support groundbreaking research that could one day form the basis of a cure for a disease. And there is so much in between. The difference between well and poorly communicated research could be the difference between whether or not a patient

understands the risks involved in taking their medication, or a company's decision to support and raise large sums of money for one particularly charity or another.

There are a variety of routes one can take to the end destination of medical writer. Some are traditionally trained writers with a passion for science, some clinicians who are multitasking and find an outlet for their creativity in communication, and then there are those like me; career scientists who found that explaining their own work and that of others was just as exciting as being at the bench. But, no matter what the journey, all serve a common goal: sharing their enthusiasm for medicine and basic science with the rest of the world.

How to be both

I'd like to have another conversation with the same man in the pub now that I am better equipped to explain my research to him. Sadly, this is not possible as he's no longer my friend's partner and so doesn't talk to either of us. But, it is thanks to him in some part that my interest in, and appreciation of, medical writing and communication was piqued.

Medical writers are the bridge between the lab and the outside world. In this capacity, writers play a dual role; to partner with researchers to communicate their work with the people it will affect, and to be of service to the public. After all, we each deserve to know what our charity donations and taxes fund, as well as where our next medication will come from.

Abbie Fearon