

A decade of change: A new ISMPP has arrived

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Abstract

Founded originally as a not-for-profit society to provide education, advocacy, and best practices for those involved in medical publication planning, the International Society for Medical Publication Professionals (ISMPP) has grown in size to over 1300 members throughout the world. As ISMPP approaches its 10th Annual Meeting, significant changes are occurring within the industry, as well as in the organisation's operating structure, including the hiring of a full-time President and Chief Operating Officer to help drive the vision and mission of the organisation and provide a 'visible' face to ISMPP. Additional changes include a reassessment of key elements of ISMPP's vision and mission, increased organisational collaborations, and more proactive positions across numerous areas of interest in support of its members. At the same time there are significant concerns across the industry regarding initiatives that undermine the credibility and intrinsic value all publication professionals hold dear, which is transparent and ethical scientific exchange.

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Founded originally as a not-for-profit society to provide education, advocacy, and best practices for those involved in medical publication planning, the International Society for Medical Publication Professionals (ISMPP) has grown in size to over 1200 members throughout the world. More significantly, ISMPP has evolved beyond a core group of pioneers and is now becoming increasingly recognised for its contribution in establishing ethical and transparent publication practices and standards, for advocating and taking a leading position on issues facing our profession, and for the creation of educational content and tools that provide value to its members globally.

New President and Chief Operating Officer

A recent significant change in ISMPP's structure was the creation of a full-time Chief Operating Officer position, which I proudly assumed in October of this year. This new role was designed as a basis to lead the permanent ISMPP office staff and is accountable to the ISMPP Board of Trustees (Figure 1). The creation of this role will allow for a more concentrated focus on organisational leadership, strategy development, external affairs, and organisational management. Additional advantages include a more visible external 'face' for ISMPP, continuous and recognised leadership, the possibility of increased and more strategic organisational collaboration, reduced role strain on volunteer Board of Trustees officers, and by moving from an implementation model to a governance model, an optimised Board of Trustees.

A growing value proposition

ISMPP's growing stakeholder base includes representation from medical writers, publishers, journal editors, academics, medical communication professionals, and individuals from pharmaceutical, biotechnology, and medical device companies. While these groups may not have been fully aligned based on historical relationships, the value proposition we offer healthcare providers and patients can and should be aligned. All stakeholders believe that research should be conducted in the most objective manner through application of scientific methods. In addition, all groups believe that research results be developed in an objective and transparent manner and subsequently published in peer-reviewed journals. These are important areas of alignment because the peer-review literature is one of the most important sources of information for healthcare providers and directly influences patient care.

Many established ISMPP activities and benefits support the above value proposition. These

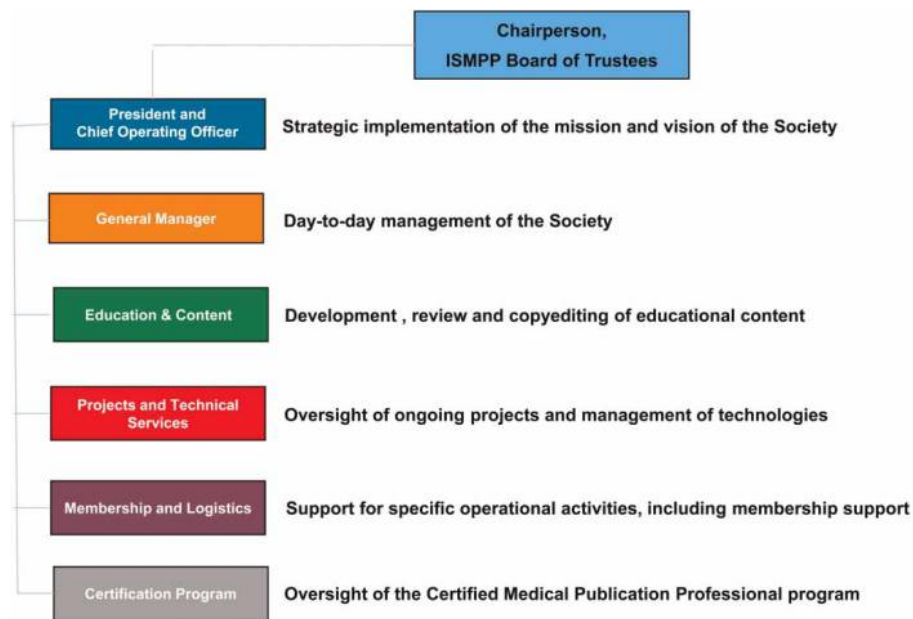


Figure 1: ISMPP organisational structure.

include the Annual and European Meetings, Good Publication Practice for Communicating company Sponsored Medical Research (GPP2), monthly ISMPP University webinars, ISMPP Educational Archives, Code of Ethics, and ISMPP's Ambassador and Research Grant initiatives. The Certified Medical Publication Professional credential, which is earned by passing a 150-item examination, provides a validated qualification of medical publication professionals' expertise and promotes integrity and excellence in the profession by demonstrating knowledge of, and encouraging adherence to, best-practice standards across the industry. New initiatives underway to further ISMPP's commitment to our shared value proposition include leading the development of Good Publication Practice 3 (GPP3), a Code of Conduct, a Publications Standards Handbook, and Asia-Pacific specific educational training, just to highlight a few.

Collaboration and leadership

While attending the September 2013 *International Congress on Peer Review and Biomedical Publication*, I was struck by changes in attitudes that had occurred since the meeting 4 years ago in Vancouver. There was more open collaboration among various stakeholders, in addition to a greater diversity in the poster and oral presentations. Although not perfect, this is hopefully one example of a more

collaborative approach to sharing information and working to bridge differences, while adding to our shared value proposition. As ISMPP continues to grow over the coming decade, it will seek to further develop its leadership position by creating unity and strength in collaboration with various organisations. This will include taking a proactive stand on key issues (e.g., Sunshine Act recommendations), further expanding our geographic footprint into Asia-Pacific and other regions, providing accessible educational platforms and tools, and doing all we can to advocate for the highest possible ethical standards in medical research and biomedical publishing.

Conclusion

While still in its formative stages, ISMPP has accomplished a tremendous amount in its first 9 years of existence. Its new organisational structure, combined with a rich resource of volunteers from its membership ranks, will be critical in collaborating with other stakeholders as a basis to move the profession forward. Equally important, ISMPP will more proactively assess and react to important issues to ensure the validity and credibility of our efforts, support and establish standards globally, and will work to further establish an aligned value proposition with all stakeholders involved in medical research, publishing, and scientific exchange.

Author information

Al Weigel, MEd, CMPP, is Chief Operating Officer for the International Society for Medical Publication Professionals, where he is responsible for implementing

the strategic goals and vision of the Society. He has previously been the head of publication teams at sanofi-aventis, Boehringer Ingelheim and Celgene Corporation.

Oxford English Dictionary literally kills debate about contentious word

There can be few words in the English language that cause more discussion and anger than 'literally'. The following remarks from footballer-turned-football pundit Jamie Redknapp illustrate the issue:

These balls now – they literally explode off your feet. In his youth, [ex-England footballer] Michael Owen was literally a greyhound.

Now, I'm no football expert, but I've never heard of exploding footballs or players that used to be dogs. When Redknapp uses the word 'literally' it is to emphasise what are figurative statements. His aim in the above examples is to convey just how bouncy the new footballs are and how quick Owen was as a kid.

Use of 'literally' in this way causes annoyance in some quarters, mirth in others. I personally have always found it pretty amusing. And it's not as if it's something new, as these quotations from 19th-century literature show:

*His [...] body [was] literally worn to the bone – Charles Dickens (Nicholas Nickleby)
The land literally flowed with milk and honey – Louisa May Alcott (Little Women)*

Now, thanks to the Oxford English Dictionary, I no longer have any reason to smile when sports

commentators and others use the word in this way.¹ In a change that sparked outrage in the British press, the OED now includes a new definition of 'literally' as 'Used to indicate that some [...] metaphorical expression is to be taken in the strongest admissible sense'.

This is an interesting move that can be interpreted as an admission that dictionaries do not control language so much as reflect the way it is used. Although 'literally' is not really used in medical writing, its fate neatly illustrates the fluid nature of language. Medical writers need to be aware of changes in definitions, as well as the meanings of relevant new words (e.g. generalisability, stemness).

As for the 'language police', they will just have to find something else to get worked up about. Perceived misuse of the word 'like', perhaps? It's, like, so annoying.

Reference

1. BBC. Why editors are 'literally' changing the dictionary [updated 2013 Aug 16; cited 2013 Sept 12]. Available from: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-23729570>.

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