

Medical writing in Finland

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Abstract

Finland has a flourishing pharmaceutical and life science industry and research scene. Medical writing, however, is an unfamiliar term to many Finns and there is no Finnish equivalent for the title 'medical writer'. Those people who do medical writing in Finland, but are by job description something else, may be members of other associations or unions and may not even be aware that what they do is actually called medical writing. Finnish medical writers do not have an association of their own, so EMWA could serve as a forum for bringing medical writers in Finland together with each other and with medical writers in other countries.

Keywords: Medical writing, Finland, Association

Although I am originally from Finland, I have studied and worked mostly outside my native country. I have often found myself having to explain what I do for a living in other countries and in other languages, but this has been a special challenge when talking to my fellow Finns. I recently asked 'What does a medical writer do?' on an online discussion board of a Finnish patient association whose members are lay people and do not work in medicine but who, because of their illnesses, are frequently in touch with various medical professionals.

The result: nobody knew. Different things were suggested. The most popular guesses were a medical secretary, medical transcriptionist, pharmaceutical sales representative, or health journalist – the type of journalist that writes those 'Ten easy tips for losing weight' articles you find in women's magazines. Fair enough, there can be overlaps, where someone mentioned above does medical writing or vice versa; however, medical writing by definition is none of those things.

What probably makes it trickier for an average Finn to figure out what a medical writer does is that the title 'medical writer' has no real Finnish

equivalent. The direct translation into Finnish, *lääketieteellinen kirjoittaja*, can be used in some contexts, but it is not an established job description. It is also a rather long description for everyday use, and besides it does not really describe the job. Furthermore, many Finnish medical writers work for international companies, where English job titles simply make more sense. The lack of an established Finnish term reflects the fact that the medical writing field is small and rather unknown in Finland.

This does not, of course, mean that no medical writers are needed in Finland. Although a small country of five million people, Finland has a flourishing pharmaceutical and life science industry and research scene. Research is being done in companies of various sizes as well as in academia, and many international companies are represented in Finland. Moreover, hundreds of clinical trials are carried out in Finland each year, although the number of new trials has diminished in recent years, as has been the trend in Europe in general.^{1,2} Nevertheless, documents will need to be written for all the trials that are conducted. The person who does medical writing in a given company, however, may have a completely different job description.

Finnish medical writers do not have an association of their own, but many are members of EMWA or AMWA. Those people who do medical writing in Finland but are by job description something else may be members of other associations or unions, and may not even be aware that what they do is actually called medical writing. They would, of course, benefit from being able to network with fellow medical writers instead of colleagues that do similar but still different jobs, such as technical writers. Reaching these medical writers is a challenging task that will require a wider public awareness of what medical writing is. As there is no national Finnish medical writing association, EMWA may succeed in bringing medical writers together, not only in a European context, but also on a national level.

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Author information

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Plagiarism watch

Another month, another European politician enveloped in a plagiarism scandal. This time it is the turn of Annette Schavan, who, this time last year, was the German Minister of Education and Research and the holder of a doctorate. Now she is neither.

After a blogger claimed to have found evidence of plagiarism in Schavan's PhD thesis,¹ the institution that awarded it, the University of Düsseldorf, officially investigated the case and concluded that there were sufficient grounds to revoke the PhD. This decision left Schavan without an academic degree – pretty embarrassing for the minister in charge of education. Her inevitable resignation soon followed, although she refutes and is challenging the university's decision.

A week after it announced its decision, the University of Düsseldorf issued a press release explaining it.² The university claims that Schavan's case was handled just as anyone else's would have

been, and denied that the investigation was politically motivated. It further claims that what constitutes plagiarism is no different now than it was in the 1980s, when Schavan received her PhD.

References

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