

# Getting Your Foot in the Door

## Editorial

Landing the first medical writing job is not easy. Clare Chang's contribution describes her journey, the challenges she faced, and the different measures she took to overcome these hurdles.

EMWA is very much aware of these challenges, as addressed at the 3rd Annual Internship Forum at the Spring Conference in Barcelona. Outside of the Spring Conference, EMWA members as part of the Ambassador Programme continue to spread the word about medical writing by giving presentations at educational institutions, careers fairs, and other events.

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## Paving the path towards medical writing

*Reading is like breathing in, writing is like breathing out.*

– Pam Allyn

My love affair with books and writing stemmed from childhood years before I could even begin to comprehend my obsession. I wrote essays, songs, and blogs. The eloquence of writing – the way words dance on paper to paint beautiful imageries – has always been something that mesmerised me. However, there is also a rational side to me, one that is hungry for the way the world works with a spot of altruism. This is the side that propelled me into the world of science.

Starting right from the basics, understanding the building blocks of life, all the way to uncovering mechanisms and developing compounds to treat diseases, I chased relentlessly after degrees that would signify my expertise. Despite my thirst for knowledge, I did not forget my other passion. During my master's programme, I started to freelance as an editor, translator, and writer for clients from various scientific backgrounds and businesses. Curiously, this side job of mine ignited an idea during my PhD training: How can I combine writing with my love for science while translating research into the societal dimension?

As I embarked on my new quest, my career counsellor at Aarhus University introduced me to a medical writer. I remember what resonated with me was that medical regulatory writing wasn't just about writing; in fact, it stood at the crossroads of project management and consultation. To me, this was a relief! Although I enjoyed constructive

aloneness, I also relished in constructive discussions and collaborations. During this time, I also tried to find more resources related to medical writing. I especially liked the book *What Every Medical Writer Needs to Know. Questions and Answers for the Serious Medical Author* by Robert B. Taylor. Not only does it describe the work medical writing entails, it also discusses the personalities of medical writers and provides pointers on how to increase one's visibility to enter the medical writing world.

As the end of my PhD training loomed closer, I decided to start my job search 6 months before the hand-in date.

I managed to get an interview a month into my job search. I went for the on-site interview; 2 months later, they responded to me with a "no". When I asked for feedback, they said that it was because I lacked collaboration and conflict resolution skills. I moped over this for about 2 days, then proceeded to concentrate on writing my thesis. Fast-forward 2 months, I completed

my thesis in August and started to think about the hiring manager's response. I thought that

I needed her to know that I had collaboration and conflict resolution skills so I wrote an email to her and gave her three scenarios that depicted

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Clare (Chi Chih) Chang

both skills. A week later she told me that there was a new job posting and that I should apply for it (which of course I did).

As my job search grew more desperate, I remembered coming across the Cheeky Scientist Association (CSA), which helps academics transition into industry. I did not know anyone who used their services, but I decided to take a leap of faith and joined the CSA. The focus of the CSA was to help academics understand industry lingo, etiquette, and goals, with a focus on networking. I then realised that the only reason I managed to get the

first interview was due to the aforementioned mentor, who acted as my referral.

I was then contacted for a job interview in mid-September but was informed that they were not going to take it further – this time it was because I did not have project management skills and I did not show enough interest. This time I was rather annoyed because I knew that project management is one of my top skills. So, I wrote another email to the human resources (HR) department to address these two issues. Two

days later, HR replied and said they would like to give me the second interview. This time I was really worried because I thought that I was just really lousy at interviews. I booked our university career counsellor to ask her for interview advice. I read as much as I could about what to do and came up with numerous answers in response to possible interview questions. I also prepared for the interview using the STAR (situation, task, action, result) technique.<sup>1</sup> Personally, I thought the interview went really well. I even met the vice president and our interview went overtime, too. However, they still decided on another candidate.

Through all of this I have also been in contact with recruiters and HR personnel from other companies (over 20 interviews). However, obtaining a work visa was always an issue – I'm

from Taiwan and I have been looking for medical writing positions abroad. It has been a difficult experience so far, but I must say, attending networking events, cold contacting interesting professionals on LinkedIn (more than 50), and the interviews have all given me insight into the lives of medical writers at different types of companies (for example, CRO vs. pharmaceutical companies, and large vs. mid-size companies). Additionally, learning more about clinical development via online courses, studying the ICH guidelines, and more recently, joining EMWA, AMWA and other professional networks, have helped me solidify a foundation in regulatory documents and guidelines that writers use. Finally, I joined Toastmasters to develop public speaking and leadership skills, which will prepare me for times when I will have to face clients and talk during roundtable meetings. Amongst the numerous defeats, I have slowly found ways to overcome each obstacle, while learning more about the regulatory world and myself. I am currently developing a blog to document my development, provide resources for other aspiring writers, and showcase my writing. Hopefully, these bricks will pave a path towards regulatory medical writing.

## References

1. Doyle A. What is the STAR Interview Response Technique? [Internet]. The Balance. [updated 2017 Dec 16; cited 17 April 2018]. Available from: <https://www.thebalance.com/what-is-the-star-interview-response-technique-2061629>.

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**Save the date:**  
**EMWA Conference**  
**WARSAW**  
**Nov 8–10, 2018**  
 For more information:  
<https://www.emwa.org/conferences/future-conferences/>

## The EMWA Ambassador Programme

We have initiated the Ambassador Programme as part of EMWA's strategy to raise awareness about the medical writing profession and the benefits of joining our organisation. The goal of the programme is to recruit experienced EMWA members to give presentations at university career events, professional training organisations, and medical conferences. So far we have made a good start.

On October 19, 2017, Abe Shevack, then EMWA President, gave a talk at the National Congress of Clinical Research in Bucharest, Romania. This gathering included 200 professionals from the Romanian health and education authorities, pharmaceutical companies, CROs, medical students, and clinical investigators. This was the first time that a representative from EMWA had given a talk in Romania. On February 22, 2018, Abe addressed a group of over 30 PhD students at the PhD Winter School of the Leibniz-Institute for Molecular Pharmacology in Berlin (Buch). The feedback was positive with a number of the participants mentioning that they had never heard of medical writing before.

EMWA Vice President Tiziana von Bruchhausen has also given two presentations on medical writing and EMWA. The first one was in Rome on January 16, 2018, at Alfa FCM for a group of 30 young physicians working in medical research. On March 9, 2018, Tiziana gave another talk at the Dr Notghi Academy to a group of trainees in clinical development in Berlin. Both sessions went well and have opened the way to future collaborations between our organisations.

EMWA Past President Alison Rapley has given two presentations on medical communications and EMWA. One was at the Biosciences Day at Reading University on January 31, 2018, to 30 students at the Young Biologists Forum of the Royal Society of Biology. She also presented a career talk to 40 students and an interactive course on medical writing skills on March 6, 2018, at the University College, London, during the university's Insight into Health and Life Science Careers Week. This talk was com-

pletely booked within a day of advertisement.

Raquel Billiones, Past EMWA Honorary Secretary, delivered a talk on careers in medical writing at the Zurich Life Science Day organised by the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology (ETH) and the University of Zurich on February 1, 2018. The audience was composed of PhD students ( $\approx 50\%$ ), postdocs ( $\approx 30\%$ ), MSc and BSc students ( $\approx 20\%$ ), and young professionals ( $\approx 10\%$ ). As of this writing, Raquel is scheduled to present two talks on behalf of EMWA on April 19, 2018, at the MedTec Europe 2018 in Stuttgart, Germany. One presentation is titled *Introduction to EMWA and the Role of Medical Writers in the Medical Devices Industry*.

Also at the time of this writing, Anne McDonough is scheduled to give a talk at Anglia Ruskin University – Faculty of Medical Sciences and Public Health Careers Day at their campus in Essex on April 18, 2018.

Scheduled next is a joint presentation by Raquel and Abe at BioM (Munich Biotech Cluster) on July 5, 2018, in Munich. The 1-day event targeting biotech companies and start-ups will cover the following topics:

- Introduction to the Role of Medical Writers in Clinical Trials and the Drug Development Process
- Managing the Clinical Study Protocol Writing Process
- The Clinical Study Report Development Process
- Transparency and Disclosure

EMWA wants to keep the momentum going and to participate in as many of these events as possible. We are currently searching for experienced speakers to take part in this programme.

We kindly request that members get in touch with us if they, or perhaps someone they know, would be amenable to giving such presentations. For more information, please contact the Head Office ([info@emwa.org](mailto:info@emwa.org)).

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