



## The first Geoff Hall Scholarship Award

Dear all,

My first duty is to thank all of the new and aspiring medical writers who sent an entry to Head Office for the Geoff Hall Scholarship Award. The committee has awarded one scholarship this year, but we urge anyone who was not successful to please try again, if you are eligible. The title for next year's essay is: 'Are Medical Writers Ghostwriters?'

This year's essays certainly sparked some debate, and our decision was not easy. However, I am delighted and very privileged to be able to introduce you to the first winner of a Geoff Hall Scholarship: Menorca Chaturvedi. I had intended to write a little bit about her background and experience myself, but she sent me such a lovely letter that I thought it much more appropriate that she introduces herself. Her letter is below, followed by her winning entry.

Lisa Chamberlain James  
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Dear Lisa,

As evident from my CV, I am a Master's student in Life Science Informatics at University of Bonn, Germany; currently working on my Thesis at Swiss Tropical and Public Health Institute, Basel, Switzerland. I have been actively involved in writing, editing, and blogging for over 5 years, and I love doing so. A few months ago, I started getting to know more about the field of Science Communication/Medical Writing, and realised that this would be something I would truly enjoy doing for the rest of my life.

I took up bioinformatics in college due to my love for science, but those 4 years gave me lot of opportunities to explore my potential as a writer, editor, and team manager. I became a part of the University newspaper, and learnt the art of writing effective reports

under the guidance of Prof. Venkat Pulapaka, who then was the Head of the School of Journalism at SRM University. I was later promoted to be the joint student editor of the newspaper. Meanwhile, I also started writing for *Youth Ki Awaaz*, a platform for voicing opinions on social issues and went to become the sub-editor for a few months. Besides this, I wrote science articles for the newsletter of the School of Life Sciences at my University, and was in-charge of managing the newsletter for the National Technical Festival of SRM University, right from the start to the end. I have also been involved in conducting various events and conferences at my University and also headed the domain of 'Literary' events at the National Cultural Festival in 2011.

During my 6-month internship in Heidelberg last summer, I attended the Career Day sessions organised at EMBL and DKFZ, respectively. I met a lot of professionals from the field of Medical Writing and Science Communication and used the opportunity to find out all that I could by having discussions with them. It was during the EMBL Career Day that I found out about the European Medical Writer's Association while talking to Dr Julia Forjanic Klapproth. I became a member of the organisation and decided to attend the workshops to get professionally trained. Unfortunately, I could not register for the November Conference due to financial constraints, but made up my mind to try for the Geoff Hall Memorial Scholarship.

Winning this Scholarship means a lot to me. I will definitely be attending all the conferences during the next 2 years, and beyond, while striving to improve my writing skills and become a successful Medical Writer. I am extremely grateful to EMWA for giving me this opportunity.

Thank you

Yours sincerely,

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## Where does medical writing fit in research?

'The Editor's Foreword' in *The Frankenstein Diaries*,<sup>1</sup>  
'translated from the original German and edited by

The Reverend Hubert Venables', asked the readers to believe that the legend of Frankenstein was indeed true.<sup>2</sup> The book was filled with diagrams of the experiment carried out by Dr Victor Frankenstein, the scientific equipment used at that

time and excruciating details of the 'creature' or 'monster' that was created.

While we know that this was a mere work of fiction, the fact remains that no research can be communicated to people unless it is documented in a precise and clear fashion. The art of communicating scientific information by specialised writers is known as Medical Writing. With the advancing technology, an increasing number of scientific developments are being made continuously. Different kinds of information need to be communicated clearly to different target audiences.<sup>3</sup> While pharmaceutical companies might be most interested in clinical study procedures and drug regulatory dossiers, researchers would focus on compiling their studies clearly for publication in scientific journals. Similarly, people buying medical products would expect clear instructions to come along with the packaging, and medical writers are sought to prepare the promotional literature, brochures, and handouts for healthcare products.

Some of the oldest documents on medical studies found include *De medicina*,<sup>4,5</sup> written by Celcus, said to be a physician himself who lived between 25 BC and 50 AD, the Kahoun<sup>6</sup> papyrus dating back to 1950 BC, which talks about human medicine, veterinary medicine, and mathematics and the Ramesseum IV and V papyri, dating back to around 1900 BC. Thus, it is evident that writing has been an integral part of medical research from centuries ago. Producing documents that are not well written will not help transfer knowledge to others, and neither will it be useful to those interested in making advancements in that field.

As technology has made it easier for scientists to generate more data, effective analysis and interpretation of the data is the need of the hour. Although medical writers are not required to carry out the research themselves, they have a strong understanding of the subject in order to interpret the results and present them in a simplified manner. Unless the objectives and results of a study are presented in a simplified and appealing way, one cannot expect people to understand the significance of the study. Hence, it is vital to be a skilled medical writer who can decide on the most effective ways to present data from research.

Another aspect of carrying out research is getting grants in order to carry out the proposed studies. This is where Grant Writing comes into play, and medical writers help facilitate research by writing effective grant proposals for scientific studies. It is important to write a persuasive research proposal such that the application stands out, and results in obtaining funds. Certain funding agencies might

need the proposals to comply with certain guidelines or formats. Hence, one has to be very methodical and cautious while working on any such proposal.

Medical Writing also includes Medical Journalism, an area that helps bridge the gap between the scientific community and the general public. Medical Journalism strives to give the public an insight into the research carried out by scientists. It could be quite difficult for a layman to understand the latest scientific developments by reading scientific journals. Hence, it is important to simplify the data while presenting it to the readers and yet, make them understand the research as closely as possible. Besides, a medical journalist has to be very careful while writing reports and cannot go ahead with it without understanding the research very well. Since scientists explain their studies on a very technical level in journals, it is possible that they might find it difficult to explain it in an over-simplified way to the general public. This is where a medical writer or medical journalist comes into the picture, and formulates an articulate report such that the essence of the research is intact and the communication barrier between scientists and the public is bridged.

Summing up, I feel that communicating one's research to the scientific community as well as to the general public is equally important, and requires skilled writers having a scientific background. Medical Writing is an essential part of research and aids scientists in communicating their findings to the world. As Crandall *et al.*<sup>7</sup> put it, even though technology is changing the way scientists engage in research or teach, 'the written word remains one of the most important means for communicating that information to others'.

## References

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