

Profile

An interview with Ingrid Edsman on why attending EMWA conferences is so rewarding!

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Ingrid Edsman, with 17 years of increasingly senior clinical research positions in the Pharmaceutical Industry, is an expert in the preparation of regulatory and clinical documents. She obtained a Medical Degree at the Karolinska Institute in Stockholm in 1986, worked five years as a medical doctor and joined the pharmaceutical industry in 1991. Work in big pharma included clinical safety, project management, and clinical data analysis and system development from the user perspective. All positions involved extensive writing, and the combination of science and writing suited her well, so in 2006 she became medical writer, and in 2008 she took the leap into self-employment.

Ingrid has been a member of EMWA since 2007 and has so far attended all conferences but one. We therefore turned to her to find out what keeps Ingrid coming to conferences and what EMWA has offered her as a member of a professional association.

Medical Writing (MEW): How did you learn about EMWA and what persuaded you to join our association at the very beginning of your career?

IE: When I became medical writer in 2006, I attended a medical writing course in Prague where the lecturers were the EMWA veterans Stephen de Looze, Barry Drees and Alistair Reeves. They encouraged the participants to join EMWA, and when I learned about the educational programme and networking opportunities, it was an easy decision to join.

MEW: How has EMWA influenced your professional pathway as a freelancer? How different do you imagine your career would be, if you worked as an in-house employee in a big pharma company?

IE: Through EMWA I have realised that medical writing encompasses many different kinds of writing and documents, which has helped me to expand the medical writing services I offer as a freelancer. My focus is still on regulatory writing, but I now take on other types of documents, for example, conference reports, manuscripts, white papers and advisory board reports.

The art of freelancing can be tricky, and the possibility to discuss business matters with other freelancers and get advice at the biannual Freelance Business Forum is definitely helpful. The Freelance

Resource Centre on the EMWA website also provides lots of useful information on all aspects of freelancing, and the Freelance Directory is an important marketing tool.

As an employed medical writer, I would most likely have worked on a smaller range of documents, and I would probably not have had the same possibilities to attend EMWA conferences due to financial constraints on training budgets in many companies. What I particularly like about being self-employed is that you have the power to make your own decisions, for example, about educational activities, which is something I prioritise in my company.

MEW: You've been a member of EMWA for eight years. You have attended so many different workshops and obtained several certificates (foundation and advanced). You have so much experience and a great client portfolio. So what keeps you returning to EMWA conferences?

IE: Learning is lifelong, and EMWA has training tailored to the needs of medical writers. I still learn a lot from workshops on topics that are new and interesting to me, but I welcome the new EMWA initiatives with one-day symposia and expert seminar series. The previous symposia have provided some interesting perspectives on writing for health economics and market access and on transparency in clinical trial data. The expert seminars, aimed at more experienced medical writers, have an exciting programme for the inaugural event in Dublin 2015, and I will definitely attend several of these seminars. In the future, I believe that a balanced mix of workshops, symposia and expert seminars will keep me coming back to the EMWA conferences.

Another major reason for returning is, of course, meeting and networking with colleagues. It is good to catch up with the many friends I have made over the years and to make new ones. Networking at conferences is primarily social, but has resulted in professional engagements on some occasions. Even though my conference schedule usually is filled with workshops, seminars and social events – making the conferences quite hectic – I find the conferences to be relaxing and pleasant breaks from everyday work. Last, but not least, I enjoy going to all the beautiful places where the EMWA conferences are held. As a Sweden-based

advocate of EMWA, may I suggest that a future conference city location would be Stockholm, also called Venice of the North.

MEW: What do the EMWA workshops offer to you as an experienced medical writer?

IE: Knowledge is perishable and needs constant ‘refilling’. It is important to keep up to date with what is happening in the field of medical writing – both the medical/science part and the writing part – so training is essential. When you are employed, you are updated in-house through company training, discussions with colleagues, etc. As a freelancer working alone at the home office, you need to go out and find your own training. There are professional organisations in Sweden offering courses in life sciences, but I think EMWA is the best option with the ambitious Professional Development Programme.

Because EMWA continually adds workshops on hot topics, I always find something that interests me. If I am familiar with the subject, it is valuable

to gauge my experience with others. If the subject is unfamiliar to me, it is stimulating to learn new things and skills, and afterwards I feel more confident about taking on assignments in that particular area. The learning experience is even better if I put in the extra time for the pre- and post-workshop assignments, which I usually do. Feedback on the assignment from the workshop leader, preferably personalised, is also a vital component in the learning process; most, but not all, workshop leaders provide that. The certificates that follow on completed assignments are a bonus and look good on my CV.

Ingrid has given us a broad view of what EMWA means to her, and it really seems that this professional association can make a difference both in your professional and in your private life. She has indeed met many of her professional contacts and made a bunch of friends at the EMWA conferences. I cannot imagine a better reason to keep coming back!

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Plagiarism: No longer grounds for retraction or correction?

The marvelous if depressing Retraction Watch blog¹ welcomed the new year by reporting contentious decisions of two journal editors not to retract or correct published articles containing substantial plagiarism.²

The case relates to Marios Sophocleous, formerly of Kansas University, and four articles he published in *Hydrogeology Journal* and *Journal of Hydrology* (two per journal). Kansas University found convincing evidence of plagiarism in these articles and contacted the journals to request their retraction. Nope, said the journals.

To explain their decisions, the editors of both journals published editorial notes.^{3,4} The *Hydrogeology Journal* note in particular makes remarkable reading. In it, Executive Editor Clifford Voss:

- Plays down the copying of substantial amounts of text without using quotation marks as ‘strictly’ plagiarism (while acknowledging that it is unacceptable)
- Explains that he rejected the idea of correcting the articles by adding the missing quotation marks because no-one would believe that his peer reviewers had accepted papers that were ‘composed of largely quoted material’³

- Argues that the articles shouldn’t be retracted as they are highly cited and thus valuable to researchers in his field

The message seems to be this: There’s no need to retract or correct papers that shouldn’t ever have made it through peer review because of extensive plagiarism if they’ve contributed to the visibility of your journal. Let’s hope other journals don’t adopt this position.

References

1. Retraction Watch. <http://retractionwatch.com/>.
2. Marcus A. Water under the bridge? Hydrology journals won’t retract plagiarized papers despite university request. Retraction Watch; 2015 Jan 6 [cited 2015 Jan 22]. Available from: <http://retractionwatch.com/2015/01/06/water-bridge-hydrology-journals-wont-retract-plagiarized-papers-despite-university-request/>.
3. Voss CI. Editor’s Message: University of Kansas (USA) plagiarism allegations regarding two *Hydrogeology Journal* articles by Dr. Marios Sophocleous. *Hydrogeol J*; 2014 Dec 20 [cited 2015 Jan 22]. Available from: <http://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10040-014-1215-0/fulltext.html>.
4. Corradini C. Editorial Note. *J Hydrol*. 2014;519(B):A1–2.

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