

# Outgoing President's Message

## EMWA: An evolving organisation

**T**ime flies – nothing new in that then! The year of my presidency is finished, so it is time to look back and summarise.

It was my first task as a president to introduce a 5-year strategic plan for 2023–2027, and together with the whole Executive Committee (EC) decide about implementation tactics for 2023–2024, the year of my presidency.

Before diving into what was done and what not, let's remind ourselves of the main elements of EMWA's strategy:

- Leverage the value of our profession
- Grow and strengthen the association
- Expand educational and networking opportunities
- Build and foster partnerships
- Mitigate medical mis/disinformation
- Facilitate responsible use of technology
- Continue and expand sustainability initiatives

Since it is impossible to take care of everything, the EC decided to focus on:

- Growing and strengthening the association
- Expanding educational and networking opportunities
- Building and fostering partnership
- Facilitating responsible use of technology.

We thought that this choice of priorities would result in leveraging the value of our profession. We deliberately left out mis/disinformation and sustainability from the list since both are supported by ongoing EMWA activities. For example, during the latest virtual conference in November 2023, Ivan Oransky, MD, co-founder of *Retraction Watch* and editor-in-chief of *Spectrum*, opened the conference with his very inspiring talk on publication retractions. It is notable that in 2000 only 40 papers were retracted from the scientific journals, whilst in 2022, it was more than 5000. These numbers are both good and bad news. On the one hand, they suggest much more efficient control over the quality of published data, but on the other they deliver a warning: Be cautious and critical while reading scientific publications, and this is not only in regard to predatory journals. Sustainability is nicely taken care of by the Sustainability Special Interest Group (SIG) led by Kimi Uegaki. The Sustainability SIG was established in 2020

to support the United Nations' 2030 agenda for sustainable development from the perspective of a not-for-profit professional organisation for medical writers and communicators. The group ran a project aiming at estimating EMWA's carbon footprint, and the results were published in *Medical Writing*, Vol. 32, Issue 2, as *Carbon footprint of EMWA activities: A first estimate* by Blanca Gomez-Escoda, Pavlína Cicková, and Raquel Billiones.

Now back to the priority list. A number of activities were undertaken to meet our goals, some of them linking different strategic initiatives. For example a newly established Regulatory SIG falls under "Grow and strengthen the association" as well as "Expand educational and networking opportunities", which was a continuation of the Regulatory Public Disclosure SIG. We on the Executive Committee felt that EMWA should have a SIG that covers a much broader scope of regulatory matters than just public disclosure. Therefore, a general regulatory SIG was created with Sarah Hopwood and Jules Kovacevic as co-chairs. The SIG meets regularly to discuss different topics of interest and has also created a LinkedIn group with the following subgroups:

- Transparency and disclosure led by Zuoyen Lee
- Clinical regulatory writing led by Sarah Hopwood
- Non-clinical writing led by Sally Hill

There are a few other subgroups in the pipeline such as orphan drug applications, advanced therapy medicinal products, and documentation for paediatric studies.

The other initiative that spans various strategic elements is the Artificial Intelligence (AI) Working Group run by Sarah Tilly. This group is distinct from SIGs but closely cooperates with all SIGs and consists of representatives from each of them. The AI Working Group is very active – preparing a mini symposium for the November conference and



**Maria Kołtowska-Häggström**

EMWA President 2023–24

president@emwa.org

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several on-line seminars, and the full day symposium on AI in medical writing that took place at the Spring conference in Valencia.

Speaking of education and networking we ought to include Local EMWA Groups (LEGs). This recent initiative addresses the need for local networking, discussions, information sharing,

and the dissemination of best practices in a given European country or geographic area – enabling communication in the mother tongue. LEGs should facilitate EMWA and its members to contribute to important country-specific conversations around medical writing. They are open to all EMWA members and constitute a platform to share country-specific expertise, discuss local needs and improve the attractiveness of EMWA to new medical writers. This year, two LEGs have been created – Italian and Polish.

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Finally to finish on the topic of education, we explored the feasibility of introducing formal education, i.e. getting a university degree in medical writing, though this did not prove to have merit. Having explored many options, we decided to focus on developing EMWA's Professional Development Programme not only in terms of the number of workshops offered and variety of topics they cover but also in terms of developing different formats of educational events. Here, I would like to mention Expert Discussion Groups (EDGs), an initiative that started in Spring 2023 during the conference in Prague. The concept was introduced by Jules Kovacevic, Laura Collada Ali, and the EPDP Team to involve experienced medical writers and



to create a platform for expert discussions on specific, advanced topics. Meetings of small groups (8–10 participants) are scheduled to last 1.5 to 2 hours, and the discussions are led by carefully chosen moderators. The participants need to be professional medical writers with ≥10 years experience and with a special interest and experience in the topic for discussion. The pilot EDG sessions that were launched during the conference in Prague were very much appreciated and well attended, so EDGs will continue during our spring conferences.

To strengthen EMWA as an organisation, we have completed a number of “house-keeping” tasks such as: fine-tuning our GDPR processes; introducing new email addresses for better and more specific internal communication; signing an agreement with a law firm to provide legal support at short notice; and also contracting a marketing and public affairs advisor. Finally, our contract with Moore Insight (our administrative and accountancy support provider) is to expire by the end of 2024, and therefore we have started a tendering process to select the optimal solution for EMWA to move forward and use members’ money in the most efficient way. In these and many other tasks John Dixon’s engagement and hard work cannot be overestimated.

Thinking about EMWA members we proposed a new position within the EC – membership manager, a person who will serve as a point of contact for members, facilitate communication and collaboration within EMWA, streamline volunteering applications by matching volunteers’ expertise with EMWA’s needs, and respond to members’ expectations and inquiries. The other initiative, prepared by John, is a new membership structure with different tiers of costs. Both proposals were passed at the Annual General Meeting at the conference in Valencia.

Another major undertaking, driven by Allison Kirsop, is to rebuild our website. The new design will be modern, easy to navigate, and will enable easy location of items of interest. The work started with thorough research to gain insights into membership needs.

Openness, collaboration, and partnership are highly valued by EMWA. This means not only individual members holding memberships in other organisations but also EMWA fostering

more formal cooperation and executing joint activities with other organisations. EMWA continues to develop projects with our old friends AMWA, ISMPP, and Open Pharma. Recently, EMWA supported AMWA in the development of a model apprenticeship framework. This project aimed to create a unified skill standard that describes capability expectations by job level for the development of medical writers. A new initiative is to start close collaboration with the European Association of Science Editors (EASE) and become mutual sister societies.

Last, but definitely not least, I would like to thank my friends from the Executive Committee without whom my year as EMWA president would have been much tougher and less enjoyable! I am convinced that we, as a team, have served EMWA members to the best of our ability and have done our best to uphold the values of the organisation. This fantastic group includes Sarah Tilly (president-elect), John Dixon (treasurer), Somsuvro Basu (honorary secretary), Raquel Billiones (editor-in-chief), Slávka Baronikova (conference director), Diana Ribeiro (PR officer), Jules Kovacevic (education officer), Laura Collada Ali (education officer), and Allison Kirsop (website manager) – thank you again! A particular thank-you goes to Allison who has decided to retire from her position as web manager. Allison will be replaced by Andrew Balkin – welcome, Andrew, to this very exciting time of the new website launch! I would like to

express my sincere appreciation to Slávka, who again volunteered to stay on as conference director to continue to organise our conferences.

At the same time I would like to recognise Emma Halloran, Lenka Roper, Claire Whittingham, and Lisa Wilson from Head Office whose hard work and support made our plans and ideas happen.

I feel very confident handing over the presidency to Sarah Tilly, whose contribution as a president-elect assures excellent

and very thoughtful leadership during her tenure. And with great pleasure, I welcome Martin Delahunty as a new president-elect and wish him and the entire Executive Committee under Sarah’s presidency a fruitful and enjoyable time.

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