

# Medical Writing

## Statistics for Medical Writers

**Phil Leventhal**, Editor-in-Chief

Until recently, statistics was a subject that I avoided at all costs. I found it difficult to understand and boring, and for years I swore that I would never learn about or be interested in statistics. (By the way, I also swore that I would never become a medical writer.) Since becoming a medical writer just over 10 years ago, I have gradually warmed to statistics and now even find it interesting. However, I still think that statisticians are an alien species that speaks a different language. If you don't believe me, try to get a straight answer from a statistician!

I have come to realise that, to do our jobs well, we medical writers must have at least a basic understanding of statistics and must be able to communicate and collaborate effectively with biostatisticians. This issue of *Medical Writing* provides a wealth of information to help get you there. **J. Rosser Matthews** starts the issue off with an article on the history of biostatistics, which helps provide some context about how and why statistics is used in medicine. Then, in two articles, **Tom Lang** discusses how statistics can be used to mislead the reader and what can be done about it. He and **Douglas Altman** also provide us with an update of the SAMPL (Statistical Analyses and Methods in the Published Literature) guidelines for reporting statistics in medical journal articles. Elsewhere, EMWA's resident statistics expert, **Adam Jacobs**, offers us a guide on understanding and reporting meta-analyses, and *Medical Writing* Co-Editor **Stephen Gilliver** and colleague **Neus Valveny** provide a guide on understanding and reporting multivariable analyses. These articles are complemented by two others, one from **Scott Miller** and **Raquel Billiones** and the other from **Eugenia Radkova** and **Ivan Dobromyslov**, on collaborating and communicating with biostatisticians. In addition, the In the Bookstores, Webscout, Lingua Franca and Beyond, Gained in Translation, and Profile sections add to the wealth of information on statistics in this issue.

Speaking of sections, I would like to announce a new regular section, Getting Your Foot in the Door,

led by Section Editor Raquel Billiones. Getting Your Foot in the Door will include articles on how to launch a career in medical writing, and it is part of an initiative that resulted in the first annual Internship Forum at the EMWA 2016 spring conference in Munich, which is described in this first instalment of the section.

To end, I think that we all could use a bit of humour given the Brexit madness, the Trump madness, and a variety of other disturbing current events. So, for a good laugh related to statistics and biostatisticians, take a look at the cartoon "Biostatistics vs. Lab Research" on YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PbODigCZqL8>).

Phil



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