

Getting Your Foot in the Door

Editorial

The Vienna Conference is done and dusted. But the aftermath is so rewarding, as my knowledge has broadened and my network has widened. It was a joy to meet old colleagues but also get to know many people who are new to medical writing.

In this Getting Your Foot in the Door (GYFD) edition, I am especially happy to feature two testimonials from EMWA newbies. I want to thank Adriana for her constructive feedback and hope we can use her ideas for future EMWA events.

I met Sanjukta at an EMWA ambassador event in Munich in 2018 and was really pleased to her again on Vienna. I also want to congratulate her on getting her foot in the door – she recently started a regulatory affairs position.

See you in Malmö!

Raquel Billiones

SECTION EDITOR



Raquel Billiones

medical.writing@billiones.biz

Wanted: A “medical writing for dummies” manual

Vienna 2019 was my first EMWA conference. Coming from 8 years in academia and this event being my first experience into the medical writing field, what first struck me was the friendliness and genuine desire to network felt throughout the conference. Networking is taxing at the best of times, but here it was built in into the fabric of the profession. I was surprised to learn many of the attendees were freelancers; freelancing was a new reality that I had never thought of before. Talking with freelancers gave me a new perspective but the lack of guidance and mentoring starting out

a new career was a bit daunting and I needed to know more. I saw in the programme that there was a session entitled Getting into Medical Writing (GIMW) at the beginning of the conference and an Introduction to Medical Writing (Intro MW) at the end. I was confused by the similarity of the names but decided to attend both and learn as much as I could.

At GIMW, four medical writers of different backgrounds presented their personal experiences of how they became medical writers and what they currently specialised in. It was informative

but it also felt like unused potential. These people are experts at their particular fields, and while it is interesting to know their stories, we were there to know how to get started ourselves. I want to know what I require to become a medical writer, how to improve my skills continuously and become an experienced professional. Afterwards, there was an individual CV clinic with two experts which had to be arranged beforehand. Again, I felt there would have been more benefits from a short presentation on the subject instead.

On the very last day, there was the Intro MW session. Magali Le Goff presented a condensed picture of medical writing: what it is, what are the skills needed, and how to tailor your resume. I learned new things and consolidated my knowledge of others I had known before or learned throughout that week at the conference. However, it felt disjointed to have that session as

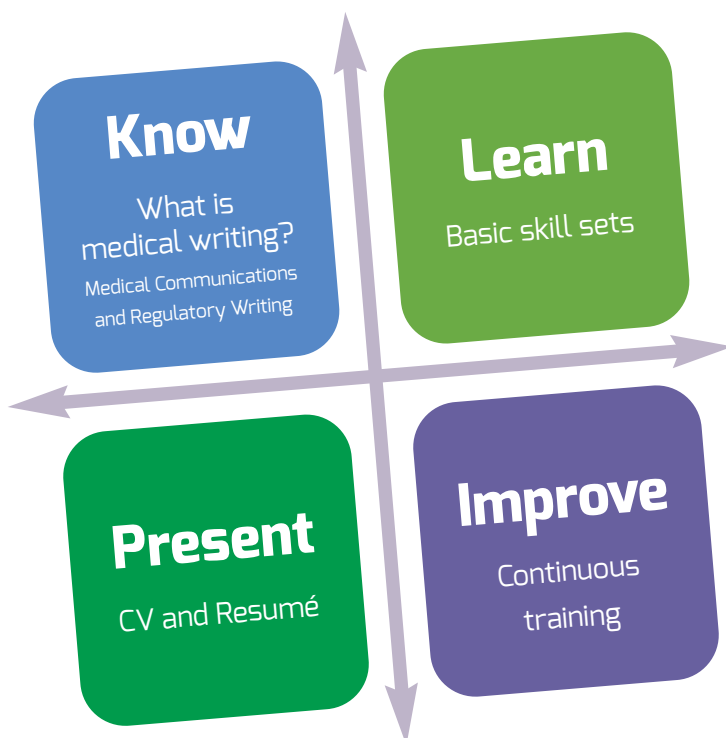


Figure 1. The medical writing for dummies method:

1. *Know*: know how medical writing is divided into medical communications and regulatory writing, what are the specifics to each field.
2. *Learn*: what do you need to learn to be a medical writer (text editing, language, relevant regulations and guidelines, etc.)?
3. *Present*: as an aspiring medical writer, how do you present yourself to potential clients or employers, what are the rules to a good CV?
4. *Improve*: as a medical writing professional, how do you improve your skills, learn new ones, share your knowledge?

the very last one of the conference, when it should have been the first.

Solely from my point of view as a newcomer wanting to learn more about medical writing, the Intro MW should have been the first event, followed by the tools and skill sets necessary to become a good professional. Within that scope, I would also like to know more how to get involved in EMWA. There were separate sessions such as the freelance business forum or the education committee, as well as other opportunities I heard from various people, but it would have been useful to have a centralised event where I can learn about volunteering, contributing to the official journal, creating a webinar, know about other (non-EMWA) online courses that helped other newcomers or even give a workshop. Finally, ending with a CV clinic presentation would complete the Medical Writing for Dummies Manual that would be invaluable for anyone entering the field (Figure 1).

I do understand the EMWA conference is a large event and that it is logistically challenging to schedule rooms and speakers. That being said, one constant reminder throughout the



conference was that EMWA was made by its members, for its members. And indeed, the potential is there, with talented speakers willing to volunteer their time and knowledge to teach others. A centralised medical writing for dummies committee would be able to structure

and present these sessions to better give a head start to its newest members.

Adriana Rocha
adriana.duarte.rocha@gmail.com

How the EMWA community helped me shape my career

During the last years of my work as a senior postdoctoral researcher, I realised that much of my explorative self was somehow bound by a false sense of security and procrastination to try a career change. It took me time, but I started to slowly peep “out of the box” to find a way for reorientation. To start, I tried to take different types of courses ranging from project management, agile methods to social media and discovered a short one-day introductory course on medical writing at the Munich Biotech Cluster. Much to my surprise, this one-day course with Raquel Billiones and Abe Shevack, both senior members of EMWA, had actually laid the foundation of where I stand today. It was through this course that I came to know about EMWA.

This, in fact, was the source of light in the dark, seemingly never-ending tunnel. I enrolled myself for an extensive advanced training in Life Science Management at ATV Munich, to learn the fundamentals of clinical research and regulatory affairs. With the training, I found quite some overlap between my updated background and the professional profile of a

medical writer. I started to look for job opportunities in the field of medical writing and was invited to the next set of surprises. Every time I applied for a job, one aspect that overruled all other seemingly important attributes was the word *experience*. Was it not evident from the articles that I published that I could probably have some intellectual capacities? Sadly, the scientific articles that resulted from multi-institutional collaborations were reduced to just numbers. I was even advised to completely strike them off from my CV, leaving me no chance for a throwback. I gradually realised that I needed something more concrete and found the 48th EMWA conference at Vienna knocking at the door. I decided to attend the conference and enrolled for workshops that are part of the EMWA professional development programme. I must say, this has been an extremely fulfilling decision.

The friendly, open spirit for professional networking was what I found most interesting at the EMWA conference. Smiles from unknown members simply coming to share a word, technical suggestions, and above all, the feeling

of hope and positivity defined my days at the conference. Adding to this, the expert workshops in global regulatory documentation have been the most enlightening aspects of the conference. The depth of the technical input and high standard of the workshops were indeed noteworthy. Group discussions and laughing back at errors, but above all, learning and exploring a relatively new avenue has been more than exciting for me. With EMWA, I truly feel to be a member of a community of individuals who are trying to help each other and foster hope and success in an otherwise highly volatile and competitive field. Added to this, I realised that mentioning my participation at the conference on my CV kindled more positive responses from recruiters. As I write this article today, I feel more confident to find a new position in regulatory documentation, to be able to define my new professional identity, and above all “to strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield”.

Sanjukta Dey-Irmler, PhD
sanjuktadeyin@gmail.com