

A history of EMWA

The early years of EMWA

EMWA has now been in existence for 25 years! How is that possible? Time has flown by, and brought with it much change and growth of which we should be proud. This is an opportunity to reflect back on the organisation as it was at its genesis, is today, and has the potential to become in the future. As one who was around in the antediluvian days, this article presents an opportunity to recall the early years and indulge in a trip down Memory Lane. This allows me to cover the early days of EMWA and to fondly recall colleagues whom I now think of as friends, as well as to remember some who are no longer with us.

The primordia of a medical writing group in Europe can be traced back to October 11, 1990, when a group of 14 individuals, representing nine European-based companies, met at the Quorn Grange Hotel in Loughborough, UK, to discuss the possibility of creating a professional medical writing association in Europe. This was before even my time!

In April of 1991, I received a letter from a steering committee representing a collective of European medical writers. They invited me to respond to a questionnaire designed to determine whether there would be sufficient interest to formally establish a European Medical Writers Association. At that time, over 75 people across Europe had voiced interest in such an organisation. Response would drive the effort to convene an inaugural meeting.

It seems that there was enough interest, resulting in a meeting on February 21, 1992, in Brussels. This meeting was attended by 32 people from nine countries, with an interest in forming a professional association. The meeting, chaired by Jane Wynen of SmithKline Beecham, opened with a welcome address by Dr Mike Matthews (whom, I am pleased to note, was an exhibitor at the EMWA 2017 Birmingham conference). Although there were no workshops, there followed a presentation by Dr Helen Frampton on Medical Writing in the Pharmaceutical Industry and my presentation on Enhancing the Reviewability of Regulatory Documents. Following luncheon, the results of the aforementioned questionnaire were discussed, and I then

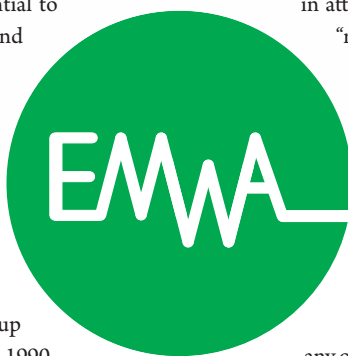
EMWA got its start as the European chapter of the American Medical Writers Association (AMWA).

spoke on behalf of the American Medical Writers Association (AMWA), offering assistance and, perhaps, an opportunity to integrate the European medical writing community into a global association. This was not well received by some in attendance who viewed this as an exercise in “reverse-colonialism”. An ‘energetic’ debate ensued after which a vote was taken. I was surprised and gratified to find that a clear majority (24 of 29) voted to become a chapter of AMWA. An Executive Committee was established, with Jane Wynen as President and Geoff Hall as Vice President, and the European Chapter of AMWA was formed.

It is important to note that the essence of any organisation is embodied in its members. This requires not only that people attend the meetings, but that they volunteer their time and energy to the maintenance and continued evolution of EMWA as a meaningful resource to medical writing professionals. We must continue to build upon the foundations established by those who had the vision and the dedication to create this wonderful organisation and to ensure that it remains a source of value to those in our profession. It is also important to remember some of those who dedicated so much but have left us too soon. EMWA honours two of these individuals through the Geoff Hall Scholarships and the Nick Thompson Fellowships.

Twenty-five years! Quite a milestone! I hope we will continue to cherish and nurture this organisation and continue on for at least another quarter century.

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From 2008 to 2014

So much has happened over the years. In 25 years, we have grown from the first 32 attendees in 1992 to more than 1,000 members. EMWA is more dynamic than ever thanks to a large group of volunteers and an excellent Head Office, run by Kingston Smith.

Sometimes it is good to sit back and reflect on the old days and how we are progressing into the future. Geoff Hall wrote a personal and passionate recollection of EMWA's history up to 2007.¹

Needless to say, the pace of change has increased since then and the history he presented was in need of an update. I am therefore starting where Geoff left off citing the high points of the terms of past presidents and occasionally letting them tell their own stories.

Julia Forjanic Klapproth (2007 and 2008)

During Julia's term in office the Press Officer position was established (now called the Public Relations Officer) to represent EMWA to the public. In addition, to encourage EMWA members to volunteer, the subcommittee organisation was put on firm footing. The EMWA "members only" section of the website was introduced, as was the first 5-year strategic plan. EMWA also contributed to the update of the guidance for Good Publishing Practice during Julia's time in office.



Julia Forjanic Klapproth

Helen Baldwin (2009)

Helen presided over EMWA relocating its base from Switzerland to the UK, and engaging a new company, MCI Group, to administer the Head Office. Helen introduced the first web-based conference survey, reduced EMWA's expenses by negotiating preferred hotel rates for conferences, introduced online downloading of workshop assignments from the website, established the Executive Committee (EC) role of conference manager, reduced the term of vice president to 1 year, and began establishing a social media presence for EMWA.

Laurence Auffret (2010)

Laurence was behind the design and first implementation of the 5-year EMWA Strategic Plan. The strategic plan details the future development of EMWA, a format is still used today. Laurence also had the idea of creating a standard EMWA presentation accessible to any member to download and use to promote the organisation, describe the scope of our activities, its benefits, the conferences, and the value of EMWA membership. During her term, a searchable archive of *The Write Stuff* was set up on the EMWA website and was very active in encouraging and recruiting new volunteers. She also continued the "buddy system" to help first-time attendees get oriented during the conferences. Laurence remains an active workshop leader with a keen interest in online communication.

Rita Wellens (2011)

Over the years changes came about in EMWA as a result of crises where major decision had to be made to ensure the smooth running of the organisation.

In May 2011, EMWA was forced to find a new management company. Kingston Smith Association Management was selected thanks to a lot of hard work by Rita and the rest of the EC. Over the years, we have been quite satisfied with the way they are running EMWA's Head Office. During the year, with a lot of hard work by former Editor-in-Chief, Elise Langdon-Neuner, we also switched from our original publication, *The Write Stuff*, to a new professionally published journal, *Medical Writing*.

Susan Bhatti (2012)

Susan made further strides in improving EMWA. During Susan's term in office, starting in 2012, the first EMWA Spring conference Symposium was organised, the Geoff Hall Scholarship was established, and a merchant's bank account was set for EMWA members enabling them to pay conference fees via credit card. Together with Vice President Andrea Rossi, she broadened EMWA's contact with other professional organisations such as the



Susan Bhatti

International Society for Medical Publication Professionals (ISMPP) and the Institute of Clinical Research. Susan's other accomplishments included extending the fall conferences to enable delegates to take up to four workshops, and initiating webinars and online voting for Executive Committee candidates.

Andrea Rossi (2013)

Andrea became President of EMWA at a time when EMWA was financially sound, which allowed the Executive Committee to introduce additional strategic improvements for the future of the organisation that we are still building upon today.



Andrea Rossi

During Andrea's tenure as President, EMWA's finances continued to grow, giving us added optimism for its future. The EC also initiated a new voting system to help increase participation, and sponsorship, members, and conference attendance continued to grow, allowing subscription fees to remain stable. At the conferences, a full-day symposium was added, with officials from the European Medicines Agency attending the first installation. Phil Leventhal took over as Editor-in-Chief and, with a new Editorial Board, added new enthusiasm to the journal. EMWA also created a Social Media group and began establishing a presence of social media, and EMWA's website (www.emwa.org) was re-designed and re-launched thanks to a lot of hard work by Webmaster Diarmuid De Faoite and Kingston-Smith.

Julia Donnelly (2014)

As you can see, social media became increasingly important for communicating between our members and for promoting the organisation. This continued during the presidency of Julia Donnelly, who also represented and spread the word about EMWA to a larger international audience.



Julia Donnelly

Sam Hamilton (2015–2016)

Sam's presidency can be characterised as a time when a number of new initiatives were started to add value for our more experienced members. Sam put in an enormous effort to initiate and guide the Core Reference document for clinical study reports, the Expert Seminar Series, and the Regulatory Public Disclosure Special Interest Group (SIG).



Sam Hamilton

Alison Rapley (2017)

During Alison's time as President, the document repository for all executive committee documents was set up as well as the EMWA conference mini-site. A dedicated email system was established for EMWA, using Office 365. The webinar programme was expanded, a position statement was drafted together with AMWA and



Alison Rapley



EMWA members kicking up their heels at the conference dinner during the Spring 2016 conference in Munich

ISMPP on the role of professional medical writers, and a dedicated managing editor was hired for *Medical Writing*.

Postscript

As you can see EMWA has gone through a lot of changes. Our organisation continues to evolve as medical writing becomes increasingly well known and as the demand for excellent medical communicators continues to rise.

Reference

1. Hall G. The History of EMWA: Personal (and possibly unreliable) recollections. *The Write Stuff*. 2008;17(1):9–11.

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The 2017 Executive Committee