

Medical Writing

Visual communication for medical writers

Scientific information in general, and especially in health-related fields, has been increasing exponentially. At the same time, people have less time to read long texts and attempt to comprehend complex scientific information. To make this easier, different types of visuals can be used to complement the text or even replace it.

Although most medical writers are not dedicated to preparing visuals, they are frequently asked to include them in patient information leaflets, posters, conference presentations, manuscripts, and other documents.

Furthermore, medical writers are increasingly asked to help prepare interactive material and to collaborate in developing web pages or apps. Visuals and texts must work together to tell a story, and both must be clear, simple, and scientifically accurate.

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In this issue of *Medical Writing*, I am honoured to present you with a collection of articles on visual communications. Not surprisingly, several of the articles cite the famous quote “A picture is worth a thousand words.” This quote is used so widely that it tends to lose importance, but its relevance to medical writing is unquestionable. Indeed, we are writers, and words are the product we sell, but we can add value to our work by including visuals.

Caroline Erolin introduces the applications and evolution of the classical visual material used in medicine – illustrations. Medical communications, however, now demand other types of visuals besides just illustrations. **Mariella Franker** presents a diversity of visuals, from illustrations to graphics and animations. She describes their relevance to translating data and increasing scientific credibility, and she offers tips to help produce effective visuals.

But how does visual communication work, and why is it so effective? **Ana Costa**, **Joost Bakker**, and **Gabriela**



Plucinska describe how perception transforms reality into unique, individual interpretations, and they present a historical perspective of visuals in biomedicine. They further explain how key aspects of visual image theory can be used to produce effective infographics.

In many instances, medical writing projects require using stock images or pre-existing images made by designers or illustrators working in the team. **Diogo Guerra** writes about how to adapt pre-existing images by adding proper callouts and labels, with practical advice and clear examples.

Katja Martin writes about the need for a visual approach to communication and further describes how graphical abstracts and infographics can improve medical communication materials. Her article offers numerous visual examples and provides suggestions for tools that non-designers can use to simplify creation of compelling visuals.

Tullio Rossi, **Flynn Slattery**, and **Katharina Richter** make the case for replacing wall-of-text posters with graphical abstract-like designs that transmit only the main message. They describe posters as a networking tool that

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should be visually attractive and should stimulate conversation and help create new collaborations.

While medical communications clearly benefit from using visuals, regulatory writing might also benefit, particularly by incorporating graphics and infographics to help visualise complex data. **Leehee Navon-Perry, Jackie Raskind, and Sara Stein** provide a good example of how simple tools accessible to any medical writer can be used to create infographics to illustrate study schemas in regulatory documents. They show how this kind of image can be used as a universal tool to easily transmit the study design to all readers, regardless of their background. **Thomas Schindler, Katrin Summerer, Leonie Leithold, Kamila Sroka-Saidi, and Clive Brown** take this point further, explaining how graphical abstracts can be incorporated in lay summaries of clinical studies. They discuss how to design a graphical abstract and highlight ethical issues involved in selecting the content.

Alexandra Sanfins and Maria João Almeida take a different perspective, showing how visuals helped establish a professional network in Portugal. They also describe some tools that allowed them to easily create visually appealing documents without previous training in graphic design.

I hope this issue will help you understand the possibilities for producing visuals as part of your work. In many instances, you can generate an effective visual by following some simple rules and by using icons or stock images. An example is the cover image I created for this issue with the precious help of Ana Costa. For more detailed images, you may need the help of a professional illustrator or designer. In any case, your visuals should be as clear and carefully constructed as your texts.

Happy reading!

Ana Goios

About the Guest Editor

Ana Goios is a Portugal-based medical writer with a scientific background from years of research in population health and genetics. She has complemented her academic training with courses on scientific illustration, data analysis and biostatistics, and the EMWA Professional Development Programme.

COVID-19 forces cancellation of conference



The EMWA Executive Committee and Head Office closely monitored the rapidly evolving implications of the current COVID-19 situation and the recommendations from the World Health Organization as well as the advice from and restrictions implemented by national governments. As a result, EMWA chose the only option available and cancelled the upcoming Prague conference that had been scheduled for May 5–9, 2020.

This will be a major financial loss for EMWA, but the organisation has been careful in spending money during the past years and have a robust enough financial reserve to be able to manage its impact.

The organisation will investigate steps such as extending the length of the November 2020 conference. Stay tuned to EMWA Newsblasts for further information.

EMWA collaboration with the German Scholars Organisation

EMWA is continuing its collaboration with the German Scholars Organization (GSO), a non-profit organisation with over 5000 members dedicated to providing career advice and networking opportunities to scientists who want to pursue careers in Germany.

As part of this collaboration, Abe Shevack was interviewed in a webinar by

Dr Anne Schreiter, the Managing Director of the GSO. The interview focused on careers in medical writing, transitioning from academia, and the role of EMWA in supporting scientists interested in medical writing.

The webinar can be viewed on YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p_kSPCU0E3U&feature=youtu.be.

EMWA Ambassador's Programme spreads its wings

On November 20, Abe Shevack gave a talk on EMWA and careers in medical writing at the regular meeting of Berlin medical writers at the Grand Café on Oranienburger Str. Altogether, 15 people attended, including organiser and EMWA member Paul Wafula and former EMWA President

Tiziana von Bruchhausen. There were lively discussions on the importance of EMWA training and certificates, mentorship of newbies, getting started in regulatory writing, and setting realistic timelines with clients. All present seemed to have a good time.