

DELAWRITER

News of the Delaware Valley Chapter



Greetings from the President

Karma forbid that I might ever be mistaken for the AMWA president, but I almost felt that way during the Annual Conference in Philadelphia! The many familiar faces from our chapter delighted me, but name tags linked to so many unfamiliar faces intrigued me even more. With now over 600 members in our chapter, why do our chapter meetings draw only 20 to 40 attendees?



I remember the days not so long ago when I too missed many chapter meetings. Work, family, socialization, rest and stupor all seemed good

excuses. But now that I've become inextricably entangled with AMWA (well, at least our chapter), I know that such excuses kept me from networking, knowledge and camaraderie. So what can the AMWA-DVC Executive Committee and I do to ensnare some of you?

- Guest speakers—We're trying to hit a panoply of topics this year, including ideas suggested by several of our members.
- Student members—Discounted charges are now being offered to

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Mark Your Electronic Calendars Now!

Ever wonder when AMWA would boldly go forward into virtual reality? Well, here comes your chance to find out! Our next chapter meeting—scheduled Tuesday, 7 March 2000—will occur in virtual space.

OK, even we need some grounding in physical reality. We plan to have our main location in the central New Jersey area, with at least one satellite location closer to Philadelphia. But our speakers will be contacting us from the University of the Rockies in British Columbia, Canada. Their New Media Institute offers an online program for an Advanced Certificate in Technical Communication. How many of us might want this option ourselves?

Although plans are not yet final, we expect that our virtual evening will start with introductory comments by Dr Stephan Beckhoff, the program's chair, followed by 3 live chat-rooms on different topics related to technical communication. So don't forget to mark your electronic calendars to meet us in virtual space!

January 2000



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Call for Information

Have an idea to share or information about yourself that you'd like to see printed in Delawriter? Contact the editor, Nathalie Bacon, via e-mail or snail mail, and I'll try to feature your information in an upcoming issue.

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students in nearby colleges who survive on shoe-string budgets.

- Giveaway raffle—Items such as books, software and other useful reference materials are now being raffled at each chapter meeting.
- Beverage coupon—Gratis (alcohol-optional) potables will be a special prize for first-time attendees—and other members who manage to bring another first-timer!

Any ideas that we've missed? Let me know!

With warm regards,



Robert J. Bonk, PhD
President, AMWA-DVC

Member News

Bernice Heller, long-time AMWA member and former president of the Delaware Valley Chapter, is recovering from a broken hip sustained in a fall in mid-October. She appreciates the thoughtfulness of AMWA members who have sent their good wishes. Bernice says she's "mending," but still has "a long way to go." For those who would like to wish her well, Bernice's address is:

#A208
310 South Easton Road
Glenside, PA 19038

Change of Address?

To ensure that you receive all AMWA-DVC mailings, please send your address changes to AMWA Headquarters at **AMWA, 40 West Gude Drive #101, Rockville, MD 20850-1192**. AMWA-DVC Board members have no means of keeping track of your address changes—all address labels are sent to us from Headquarters. Thank you for your cooperation.

Job Wanted

Central New Jersey RN working in clinical trial data management seeks internship with established medical writer to learn about clinical/NDA writing and processes. Available 6 to 10 hours a week. Please call Gretchen Reed, 609-936-1117.

Job Opportunity

Medical Writers: Aerotek is currently seeking experienced medical writers for contract opportunities in the Philadelphia area. Interested candidates with IND/NDA submission experience should contact Rich Goldbeck at 610-254-5423.

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Going Online for Health Information: Trends and Pitfalls

As medical writers, most of us use the Internet regularly in our work. Attendees at the September 28th AMWA-DVC meeting, "Medical Information on the Internet," had the opportunity to hear about the development of one popular health Web site, Intellihealth, and to learn how consumers are using the Internet to research health information. Dr Joel Kahn, Chief Medical Officer and Executive Vice President of Intellihealth, highlighted the Web site's history, provided statistics on the growing consumer use of the Internet for health information, and offered tips on how to evaluate the quality of health information on the Web.

The Branding of Johns Hopkins through Intellihealth

Started in 1996, Intellihealth is the electronic medical information news and features venture of Johns Hopkins University, Aetna US Healthcare, and Health Systems. Intellihealth was the first successful health media company with a broad reach to consumers and professionals, according to Dr Kahn. Developed to create a brand for Johns Hopkins, the site offers consumer health news, diseases and conditions, "Ask the doctor," a health encyclopedia, self-assessments, interactive quizzes and more. All material is carefully conceived and

reviewed before posting. Intellihealth works with, and provides links to, more than 150 content partners.

Consumers Turn to the Internet for Health Information

Interest in health information on the Internet continues to grow; 70% of all users have researched a health topic. Twenty-five percent of all information on the Web is health-related and health is the sixth largest content area. According to a recent survey, what consumers want most from a health-related Web site (from highest preference to lowest) is customized information, frequently asked questions, results for individual searches, 'cookie cutter' patient information, and the ability to network with others with similar diseases. As sources for online information, they prefer experts from nationally known medical centers, their own doctor, local hospitals or outpatient facilities, and condition-specific online support groups. According to a survey by America Online, health information on the Web has helped 26% of the respondents avoid an unnecessary outpatient visit, has provided a 51% increase in confidence when talking to their physicians, and has helped 65% of the respondents cope better with a health problem.

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Dr Kahn

Increased Longevity: Too Much of a Good Thing?

"The problems of aging are one of the most important issues society will face in the 21st century," said Todd Goldberg, MD, director of the Geriatric Fellowship program at the Albert Einstein Medical Center, and speaker at AMWA-DVC's December 7 meeting. Dr Goldberg's entertaining presentation combined fact and what until recently would have been called science fiction to provide a glimpse of the future.

The number of people over age 65, now at 13% of the population, will double during the next 30 years. Life expectancy, which was age 50 at the turn of the 20th century, is age 76 at the turn of the 21st century. Increased longevity means that there will be fewer money-earners to pay for the costs of living for more people on Social Security, Medicaid, and Medicare.

These changing demographics have resulted in an explosion of senior and retirement care communities, including long-term care, day care, and home care. On the health-care front, the federal government has passed laws favoring HMOs in an attempt to save money. This has resulted in more people being pushed into managed care, hospitals that are losing money, and doctors who have to sign up or lose patients. Premiums are rising and benefits are decreasing. HMOs are losing money and leaving the Medicare business. "It's not greedy capitalism's fault. It's the government's fault," opined Dr Goldberg.

Alzheimer disease is the most common and feared geriatric condition, affecting 50% of people over age 65. During the past few years, new drugs for Alzheimer disease have been approved and alternative treatments to slow its progression have been developed. More recently, nerve growth factors have been studied in humans and a vaccine is under development. This research provides hope that there may be a treatment for Alzheimer disease in a few years.

Another issue in aging is how we die. "Too many people get too much high-tech care instead of comfort care at the end of their lives," said Dr Goldberg. He added, "People want to feel that they have some control over their destiny." As more people become seniors, society will be forced to deal with these issues.

Dr Goldberg predicted that researchers will eventually find the genes that affect aging and they will be able to modify them. New technology will provide means to enhance cells, genes, and organs. Dr Goldberg predicted that "In a few years, people may be taking a cocktail of drugs and vitamins in order to live longer and healthier." Much of current medical research focuses on hormone replacement therapy as a way of warding off disease.

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Dr Goldberg

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Evaluating the Quality of Web-Based Health Information

With quackery on the Web abounding, evaluating quality is important. To find high quality health Web sites, look for:

- Branding and credentialing, such as the institutional sites of academic medical centers (but not individual sites of faculty from that institution)
- Reviewed sites: Health on the Net (www.hon.ch) and other organizations review Web sites, but at this point, most rating instruments don't have published criteria

- Source material that is credible and accurate, with credited sources, and dated material that is current
- The source of the Web site's revenue and its agenda
- Recommendations from others.

For more information about Intelihealth, point your Web browser to www.Intelihealth.com.

Lori De Milto ❖

- Increased Longevity *continued from page 3*

If people live longer, say to age 150 or 200, a host of issues will arise. For example, what will the retirement age be? When do people marry and have children? How long do those children live at home? "Our society may have to live up to some of these issues in the very near future," concluded Dr Goldberg.

Lori De Milto ❖

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