

UPCOMING MEETING

A Day in the Life of a Medical Reporter: March 11

Find out what medical reporting is really like when 12-time Emmy award-winning journalist Cherie Bank presents “A Day in the Life of a Medical Reporter” on Tuesday, March 11. Bank has been the medical reporter for NBC 10 News since June 1983. She is known for her humanistic and compassionate style of reporting. Many of her stories have been broadcast nationwide on NBC affiliates, as well as on NBC’s “Today Show” and the “Montel Williams” show.

Bank joined NBC in 1979. Before that, she was a news anchor at KTVI-TV in St. Louis. She has a degree in communications education from the University of Wisconsin and is listed in *Who’s Who in American Women*.

Note: In the event of breaking medical news that requires Bank’s immediate attention, Edie Schwager will make a delightful presentation on medical English usage and abuse.

Details

- Tuesday, March 11
5:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.
- Holiday Inn City Avenue
4100 Presidential Blvd. (at the corner of City Avenue and Presidential Blvd.)
215-477-0200
Philadelphia, Pa.

Reservations

- Cost (for dinner; cash bar):
\$30 with advance reservations
\$35 at the door
\$10 for students
- To reserve your place contact Maitland Young:
maitland@mailbug.com
610-322-4444

7th Annual Princeton Conference: April 12

AMWA-DVC’s 7th annual Princeton Conference will be held on Saturday, April 12, at the Merrill Lynch Conference & Training Center in Plainsboro, NJ. The conference will feature four Core Curriculum workshops and two non-credit workshops.

The complete program is available on AMWA-DVC’s Web site (www.amwa-dvc.org).

CALENDAR

- **Tuesday, March 11**— “A Day in the Life of a Medical Reporter,” with Cherie Bank, Philadelphia, Pa.
- **Saturday, April 12**—Princeton Conference, Plainsboro, N.J.
- **Wednesday, June 4**—Annual Business Meeting; speaker and location to be announced
- **Thursday, September 18 to Saturday, September 20**—Annual Conference, Miami, Fla.

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The Dilemma of Treatment Options

By *Lori De Milto*

After the highly publicized cessation of the Heart and Estrogen/Progestin Replacement Study (HERS), Joseph S. Ferroni, MD, director of the Gynecology and Menopause Center in Malvern, Pa., and campus chief of OB/GYN at Paoli Memorial Hospital, faced a dilemma of treatment options. At AMWA-DVC's December 4 meeting in Plymouth Meeting, Pa., Dr. Ferroni told attendees what he faced and how he guided his patients. "Health care consumers are consumed by what they hear in the media," said Dr. Ferroni, who noted that the media glamorizes certain diseases, such as breast and ovarian cancer.

HERS was a study of the risks and benefits of estrogen plus progestin replacement therapy in healthy postmenopausal women. The known benefits of estrogen, based on retrospective observational studies, are relief of vasomotor menopausal symptoms and treatment of vaginal dryness and atrophy. It is less clear whether estrogen offers cardiovascular protection and prevents osteoporosis, Alzheimer's disease, skin wrinkling, and so forth. Dr. Ferroni explained the three schools of thought on estrogen:

- **Staunch proponents:** "Start at age 9 and continue to 90."
- **Moderates:** Estrogen might be beneficial for many or most women but some conditions preclude its use.
- **Conservatives:** Routine prophylactic use of estrogen is difficult to justify, and the lowest possible dose should be used for the shortest time.

HERS was part of the NIH-funded Women's Health Initiative,

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Workshop Offers Tips on How to Succeed as a Freelance

Seventy-nine AMWA members learned how to market their business, manage their time and projects, deal with their taxes, and decide whether freelancing was right for them during AMWA-DVC's freelance workshop on January 18 in Villanova, Pa. Much thanks to program chairs Joan DeVinney, who planned the workshop, and Maitland Young, who took over when Joan had a sudden opportunity to move to Atlanta.

Marketing Your Freelance Business

By *Jennifer Long and Peggy Stansfield*

Within one and a half years of starting her freelance medical writing business, Lori De Milto had a steady flow of work and was making a good living. She told attendees how she aggressively marketed her way to success, and presented the results of a survey she conducted on how nine other successful medical writers marketed their businesses. De Milto has 20 years of experience in marketing communications and has been a freelance for six years. She offered these tips:

- **Determine your strengths:** Define your capabilities and goals. People with PharmDs, MDs, and PhDs usually do clinical or scientific medical writing. People with English or journalism degrees usually do medical marketing communications.
- **Choose the right work:** In the beginning, do anything that will help you build your experience. Once you're established, you can target your business more.
- **Create the right first impression:** Choose a meaningful company name, and consider developing a tagline (a catchy phrase that appears under your company name), and a logo (a graphic symbol that ties in with your company name and tagline) to make the message even more memorable.
- **Invest in your business:** Think and act like a businessperson, and be prepared to invest in your business. Pay for high

quality marketing materials, and spend money on marketing tactics such as direct mail, membership in professional associations, attendance at AMWA and other meetings and conferences, and advertising.

- **Create professional marketing materials:** Create clear, graphically appealing materials (business cards, letterhead, envelopes, a sales letter, a brochure, presentation folders, and direct mail pieces). Use clear copy, accentuated by a design that sets the right tone, is graphically appealing, and makes the copy easy to read. Unless you have strong design skills, work with a professional designer. If you are a scientific/clinical medical writer and do not think you have the skills to do your own marketing writing, hire a marketing copywriter. Use a printer, not a copy shop, to produce your materials.

Successful Marketing Methods

AMWA played an important role in De Milto's success. "I've gotten a lot of work through AMWA, both through the job market and through referrals," she said. "I got those referrals because I volunteered and people got to know me." De Milto's most successful marketing tactics are direct mail, referrals, and AMWA's

job market. Among the nine freelances surveyed, the most successful marketing methods were networking, referrals, direct mail, repeat business, and AMWA's Job Market (online and in print). Other marketing methods that work well for freelances include marketing materials, Web sites,

article writing, public speaking, teaching, and advertising.

De Milto ended the presentation with a quote from Thomas Jefferson: "I am a great believer in luck. The harder I work, the more I have of it."

News from National: A Report from the Annual Conference

By Eileen Moran and
Lori De Milto

- Seven hundred and thirty-five people attended the 2002 annual conference in San Diego, Calif., the highest number ever for a meeting on the West Coast. The all-time record for attendance was 880 attendees at the annual conference in Philadelphia, hosted by AMWA-DVC in 1999.

- The 2003 annual conference will be held in Miami, Fla. from September 18-20; the date was moved up to secure less expensive hotel rooms. The annual conference will be held in St. Louis in 2004 and Pittsburgh in 2005.

- AMWA-DVC had 200 new members last year—more than any other chapter.

- The distance learning project is progressing; the first module should be available in Summer 2003.

- AMWA has adopted a new ethics policy on ghostwriting: "The American Medical Writers Association recognizes the valuable contributions of biomedical communicators to the publication team. Biomedical communicators who contribute substantially to the writing or editing of a manuscript should be acknowledged with their permission and with disclosure of any pertinent professional or financial relationships. In all aspects of the publication process, biomedical communicators should adhere to the AMWA code of ethics."

This statement will be published in the

Time and Project Management

By Jennifer Long

"You have to figure out how to work smarter," said writer and editor Debra Gordon, who provided valuable insight on the many challenges freelance writers face, from generating work to managing the day-to-day administrative duties of running a business. A journalist with 15 years of experience, Gordon focuses on consumer health issues. She has been freelancing for more than two years.

The cornerstone of Gordon's system for juggling the freelance life is organization and multi-tasking:

- Break it down: Break projects into manageable chunks and make progress on each project every day.
- Get it in your face. Buy a large project board that you see every time you look up from your computer. Write down when projects are due. Keep weekly and/or daily "to-do" lists on bright paper so you can find them fast.
- Keep it all in one place: Keep track of phone calls and discussions about projects (e.g., in a notebook).
- Track your time: Know how you spend your time. Use software such as TraxTime to track projects.
- Manage contacts electronically: Use software such as ACT!TM contact management or Microsoft Outlook to manage contacts. Use

electronic files as a reminder for "keep in touch" e-mails.

- Work according to *your* schedule: You're the boss, so work on *your* schedule, recognizing the times of day you may be more productive and taking breaks when necessary. You'll be more productive when you return to work!
- Manage e-mail and documents electronically: File everything you can electronically. Set up folders for each client and sub-folders for each project.
- Work in chunks: Too much multi-tasking is inefficient. Try to work on each project in two- to three-hour chunks.
- Use the World Wide Web: Use databases, paid subscription services, and free databases accessible through your local library. Organize your bookmarks and put the GoogleTM search engine on your browser tool bar.
- Don't be a cheapskate: Pay others to do things you don't do well or have little time to do, such as filing, data entry, and computer updates and repairs.
- Ask for Monday deadlines: This gives you the weekend to clean up last minute things, to let the project sit a day before final review, and so forth.

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designed to clarify the risks and benefits of potential strategies for reducing the incidence of heart disease, breast and colorectal cancer, and fractures in postmenopausal women. HERS randomized 27,000 postmenopausal women to estrogen and progestin (16,608 women) or estrogen and placebo (10,000 women).

HERS was designed to last 8.5 years, but NIH stopped it in July 2002 (after 5.2 years), because the number of invasive breast cancers exceeded the stopping boundary. According to Dr. Ferroni, the increased risks—20 more bad events per 10,000 women—were very small and some statisticians say not statistically significant.

Within one week, more than 200 news stories were filed. The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists said estrogen should be given for as short a time as possible in the lowest effective dose, and that hormone replacement therapy should no longer be given for the prevention of cardiovascular disease. There was no clear consensus among doctors, especially OB/GYNs, on how to handle hormone replacement therapy. “We have to let people understand the risk/benefit profile and make a conscious decision.”

Conclusions

- HRT should be used only for relief of severe menopausal symptoms, not to prevent disease.
- People fear certain diseases (e.g., breast cancer) out of proportion to their incidence.
- Some diseases (e.g., heart disease and osteoporosis) need to be emphasized more in proportion to their incidence and severity.
- The print and electronic media influence decision making by women and their physicians.

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- Take breaks: When you are approaching burnout, take a day off. Leave the house and get away from your computer. Your increased productivity when you return will be worth the missed work time.
- Multi-task: Work on several things

simultaneously. Don't wait to start projects.

“Freelancing is a 24/7 job,” said Gordon. “I have never worked so hard in my life, but it's worth it because I'm working for me.”

Taxes

By Jennifer Long and Peggy Stansfield

Taxes are a key consideration for freelances. Randy Heiser, owner of Heiser Associates, a public accounting practice specializing in accounting and financial and estate issues, provided insight on business structure, IRS standards for independent contractors, tax deadlines for independent contractors, and ways to separate business and personal accounts.

The key phrase in structuring your business is “cost versus benefit.” Heiser advised freelances to start simply and inexpensively. Most independent contractors start out as sole proprietors (unincorporated

businesses). Freelances can also incorporate, which has initial and ongoing expenses and a more complicated tax structure. Another option is the Limited Liability Company, which offers some liability protection with few of the complications and costs of incorporation.

Make sure you meet the IRS's standards for independent contractors. These include whether you choose your own hours, invoice, and provide your own tools, and where you work. Independent contractors pay taxes four times a year: January 15, April 15, June 15, and September

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15. Pay taxes on time, because noncompliance is expensive. At least 90% of taxes due must be paid by April 15, or you will face interest and penalties. Many independent contractors pay interest and penalties because they rely on bad advice and procrastinate. Depending on what your tax bracket is, you should set aside at least 25% of earnings in a special tax account. You need to pay state taxes, too.

Do not lump tax money in personal or business accounts, which creates artificial wealth. “You need to operate your business, including your

business expenses, on the *net income*,” Heiser said. Freelances should have a business account and pay themselves from that account into their personal account. “Don’t operate your household on money from your business account.”

Ordinary and necessary expenses related to business are deductible, according to Heiser. In most cases, all expenses incurred to conduct business are deductible. There are many gray areas, however. Seek expert advice, maintain accurate records, and do not fabricate.

Surviving and Thriving

Bass outlined what freelances need to survive and, more importantly, to thrive. Survival requires:

- Cash in the bank
- A quiet place to work
- Tools (computer, fax, Internet connection, copier, cell and business phones)
- An exit strategy (if employed)
- An entrance strategy for freelancing (getting work and managing your time and finances)
- Chutzpah
- Energy.

Thriving moves the business to another level. “If you want to thrive, you need the endurance of a lion, to be on the job all of the time,” said Bass. Thriving requires:

- The ability to juggle many different projects as well as all aspects of running a business
- An ego of Teflon to handle rejection and dissatisfied clients
- Unending drive and focus
- A lot of guts
- Consistency in the delivery and quality of your work
- Knowledge (e.g., what to charge and how to exceed client expectations).

Thriving takes time. Gain confidence from your successes, learn from your mistakes, and know when to say no when you’re not the right person for the job. Develop contacts through AMWA, the gym, and everywhere else.

On the way to thriving, and even once you arrive, there are highs and lows in freelancing. When things are good, prepare for bad times. When things are bad, get back on track quickly. Focus on what’s important: exceeding the client’s expectations, providing quality work on time, and staying within the client’s budget.

Deciding to Freelance

By Peggy Stansfield

“**Y**ou either get out of freelance writing quickly because it’s not right for you or you will never do anything else again,” said freelance Brian Bass, president of Bass Advertising & Marketing, Inc. Bass has been a successful freelance for more than 12 years. After a brief stint at a medical communications company last year, he has returned from “the dark side” to the freelance life. Bass led the potential freelances in the audience through a series of questions to help them determine whether it is time “to leap, or not to leap”:

1. Do you **need** change?

- Do you need to be in control of your life?
- Are you working yourself to death to make someone else rich?
- When was the last time you saw your friends and family?
- Are you not doing the kind of work you really want to do?

2. Do you **want** change?

- Every hour is yours to work.

- Freelancing is a 24/7 job. “If you’re looking to take it easy, work for someone else. If you want a rewarding experience, become a freelance.”

- Every job is yours to do.

- Every success and every failure is your responsibility. You must recover quickly.

- All the job security is yours. “Job security is knowing you can get work and pay the bills. That keeps you focused and moving.”

3. Are you **ready** for change?

Bass worked for small communications companies for 10 years before deciding to freelance. He didn’t want to work for another small company and couldn’t get the larger companies interested in him, so he made the leap. He has never regretted it. “If you don’t go running screaming into the night shortly after you decide to become a freelance, you’re a lifer.” He also called the decision to become a freelance a life-changing scenario, like getting married or having children.



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News and notes from the American Medical Writers Association— Delaware Valley Chapter

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AMWA Journal. Guidelines will be available after that.

Volunteer Opportunities

- Awards Committee: Volunteers to serve as judges and chairs of AMWA's various awards. Contact Susan Aiello: wordsworld@att.net or 908-284-2144.
- Development: Volunteers to help develop new ways to raise funds for AMWA. Contact Jim Cozzarin: amwajim@aol.com or 216-595-7919.
- Workshops: Volunteers to serve as new workshop leaders (new workshop leaders usually start out leading a roundtable and/or teaching a non-credit course first). Contact Jessica Ancker: anckerj@att.net or 646-698-9533.

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