

UPCOMING MEETING

“Open Sesame—Locating and Accessing Biomedical Information”: March 23

Medical writers must be adept at locating and accessing biomedical information. Join us when two local experts from the University of Pennsylvania — Melanie Cedrone and Linda Rosenstein — share insider’s tips and knowledge.

Cedrone is a librarian at the University of Pennsylvania Biomedical Library. An expert in literature search systems, she will review recent updates and new features of the National Library of Medicine’s search service, PubMed.

Linda Rosenstein is the associate director of Information Resources at the University of Pennsylvania Biomedical Libraryshare. Rosenstein will tackle the controversial topic of open access— the right to receive and transmit biomedical information electronically.

Details

- Tuesday, March 23
5:30-8:30 p.m.
- The Radnor Hotel
591 East Lancaster Avenue
St. Davids, Pa. 19087
610-688-5800
- Cost (buffet dinner):

Members: \$35 with advance reservation; \$40 at the door (space permitting)

Non-members: \$40 with advance reservation; \$45 at the door (space permitting)

Students: \$10 with advance reservation; \$15 at the door (space permitting)

Reservations

To reserve your place, contact Andrea Laborde:

- atlaborde@aol.com
- 215-635-2947.

Please mail your check, payable to AMWA-DVC, to:

Andrea Laborde
234 Glenwood Road
Elkins Park, Pa. 19027.

**Deadline for reservations:
March 16**

No refunds will be given for cancellations less than 3 business days before the meeting. No-shows will be billed.

CALENDAR

- **Tuesday, March 23** —“Open Sesame—Locating and Accessing Biomedical Information,” The Radnor Hotel, St. Davids, Pa.
- **Saturday, April 17**—Annual Princeton Conference, Merrill Lynch Conference and Training Center, Plainsboro, N.J.
- **May** — New Jersey satellite meeting, topic, speaker, and location to be determined
- **June** — Meeting topic, speaker, and location to be determined
- **October 21-23** — Annual Conference in St. Louis, Mo.

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Bioterrorism

By *Lori De Milto*

In the wake of 9/11 and anthrax-tainted mail, Americans are increasingly aware of the threat of bioterrorism. John P. Maher, MD, MPH, County Health Director for the Chester County Department of Health, provided attendees at AMWA-DVC's November 13 meeting with a primer on bioterrorism. The meeting was held in Frazer, Pa.

Dr. Maher, a regional expert on preparations for bioterrorism, examined types of bioterrorism and regional, state, and federal preparations to deal with bioterrorism. He defined terrorism as: "the use of violence against persons or property in violation of criminal laws of the United States for the purpose of:

- Creating fear/panic
- Intimidating, coercion, or ransom
- Punishing or humiliating an opponent
- Revenge for a real or perceived wrong
- Undermining public confidence
- Getting immediate publicity
- Recruiting new members."

Dr. Maher presented lessons learned from 9/11:

1. All terrorism is local.
2. All terrorism response is local.
3. Anything can be used as a weapon (e.g., people, jumbo jets, and envelopes).
4. Terrorists do not have to kill people to accomplish their goals.
5. Any significant part of the United State's critical infrastructure can be the target of terrorists. Critical infrastructure includes: telecommunications, electric power, gas/oil/petroleum, banking and finance,

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Princeton Conference: April 17

The 8th Annual AMWA-DVC Princeton Conference will be held at the Merrill Lynch Conference and Training Center in Plainsboro, N.J., on Saturday, April 17. The conference will feature four credit workshops and two non-credit workshops.

Credit Workshops

- Statistics for Medical Writers and Editors (R) with Jessica Ancker
- The Creative Process in Pharmaceutical Advertising (PRAM) with Joel Tau
- Proofreading (EW) with Susan Aiello
- Computer-Assisted NDAs (PH) with Art Gertel

Non-credit workshops

- Successful Client-Freelance Relationships
- Regulatory Writing

For more information, contact Brian Bass at bam509@optonline.net.

Satellite Meetings Launched with Multimedia Presentation

By *Ann Sherwood*

The growing interest in multimedia for medical communications was evident from the good turn-out for Debra Newton's presentation at the first AMWA-DVC New Jersey satellite meeting. Newton, the president of Newton Gravity Shift, a technology-based communications company, spoke to an audience of close to 50 people about the role of the medical writer in multimedia projects. The meeting was held on October 29, 2003 in Princeton, N.J.

Multimedia projects can take a variety of forms involving audio, video and written contents. These projects differ from printed materials in that information is conveyed in three-dimensions—ideas are not just words on a page, but images that move and can communicate a sense of time and space. Developing this spatial sense can be challenging at first. Newton pointed out that an additional challenge for the writer is to think in terms of screens rather than pages. Because not

all viewers will navigate to a screen from the same starting place, each screen must be able to stand on its own. In addition, the writer needs to be able to "chunk" the content or break it down into screen-sized chunks to limit the need for the viewer to scroll down the screen. Topics need to be broken down into a manageable number of subtopics to facilitate navigation.

Newton encouraged writers to be an active part of the design team for the project from the earliest stages. Medical expertise combined with the ability to make the content visual and to describe the visual in words are the skills most needed to write for this format. She recommended the book *Managing Multimedia* by Elaine English (Addison-Wesley Publishers, 1999) as a resource for those who are interested in learning more.

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Back by Popular Demand: NLM Databases

By Christina M. Valente

The National Library of Medicine (NLM) has the largest collection of medical information in the world. NLM has collected and indexed biomedical literature for over 150 years using the most current technology. Attendees at the 2003 Annual Conference open session, “Back by Popular Demand: Making the Most of MEDLINE and other NLM Databases” learned what NLM databases contain, how they are indexed, and effective techniques for accessing information through NLM Web sites.

Dr. Alexa T. McCray, who works at the Lister Hill National Center for Biomedical Communications, explained that the NLM has two divisions: Lister Hill and the National Center for Biotechnology Information (NCBI). The NCBI conducts research on computational biology, analyzes gene sequences, constructs mathematical models of evolution, and maintains genomic databases. Lister Hill focuses on biomedical informatics, including extracting semantic information from existing sources, indexing, and distributing electronic “Knowledge Sources” which use the Unified Medical Language System.

Two keys to developing searchable databases for a highly diverse user group are natural language processing (e.g, linking the singular form with the plural or a noun form with an adjective) and construction of networks which retrieve relevant information even if users employ different vocabulary terms to search the same concept. To incorporate

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New Jersey Satellite Meetings a Success: Help Wanted in Planning Future Meetings

The first two AMWA-DVC New Jersey satellite meetings were a great success. “Multimedia Communications and the Medical Writer” in October and “Statistics in Medical Writing: Explaining Risks to Your Readers” in February, both in Princeton, N.J., each drew more than 50 people.

Much thanks to Kira Belkin, who suggested reviving the New Jersey satellite meetings and then served as the meeting planner. At the October meeting, Kira distributed a questionnaire to determine locations and topics of interest for future New Jersey satellite meetings. Helping Kira plan future meetings is a great way to get involved in AMWA. If you’d like to help out, contact Kira at kbelkin@att.net.

Statistics in Medical Writing: Explaining Risk to Your Readers

By Darlene Grzegorski

Attendees at the second New Jersey satellite meeting enjoyed an entertaining discussion on statistics in medical writing by Jessica Ancker, MPH. The meeting was held on February 5 in Princeton, N.J.

Ancker is a medical writer and statistician for the Traumatic Brain Injury Clinical Trials Network at Columbia University. Describing herself as “a medical writer first,” Ancker explained that her interest in statistics stems from a desire to “communicate complicated information in ways people can understand.”

Opening her presentation with a survey of the audience, Ancker led a dynamic discussion that focused on factors that contribute to the public perception of risk. “Ideas about risk form from two major factors,” said Ancker, “dread, which is a gut-level feeling, and things that are outside of personal control.”

Ancker illustrated this concept using a *USA Today* article reporting on

a scientific publication that addressed an environmentally-related health concern: levels of strontium-90 found in baby teeth. By changing certain details of the newspaper story and then asking the audience to evaluate the level of risk, Ancker demonstrated how social factors can affect the perception of risk, regardless of “the numbers.” She pointed out how “failing to provide information or putting information out of context” can affect the true meaning of the numbers. She noted that articles about medical topics often report relative changes, without clearly identifying the baseline values. A discussion on sensationalism in journalism followed, with some attendees relating their professional experiences.

Ancker went on to explain how risk is perceived to be greater in situations that:

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STATISTICS from 4

- Are inequitable (affecting someone who doesn't deserve it)
- Affect future generations (concern for children)
- Are new and/or unknown
- Are debated in science
- Are invisible/undetectable.

A subsequent critique of the scientific article drew an enthusiastic response from the audience. Numerous attendees pointed out missing elements in the study and how the data seemed to favor a particular outcome.

In one example, a graph was drawn with a y-axis beginning at 80 rather than at zero. Ancker redrew the graph with a y-axis extending from zero, demonstrating how much smaller the difference between the two experimental conditions truly was when compared to the original graph. She added that, "the desire to present relative increase is an overwhelming drive."

Summarizing the responsibility of the medical writer in communicating risk clearly and honestly, Ancker concluded, "They [the readers] need to know."

Anker is the former manager of the medical editing service at the Cleveland Clinic, where she worked with physicians and researchers to prepare their research for publication. An active member of AMWA, Anker teaches many workshops, including the popular "Statistics for Medical Writers and Editors." In 2003, she received the AMWA Golden Apple Award for outstanding teaching.

Darlene Grzegorski is a project manager with MediCom Worldwide, Inc. in Morrisville, Pa.

Second Annual Freelance Workshop: Recap Preview

Sixty-four freelancers and potential freelancers attended AMWA's Second Annual Freelance Workshop on January 17 in King of Prussia, Pa. This year's workshop featured presentations on computer issues, Internet resources, the business of freelancing, and the client-freelance relationship; Q&A; and an optional luncheon (new this year).

Michael Shapiro, president of BCG Consulting, led the workshop with a presentation on "Computer Issues for Small Business Owners." Shapiro covered broadband Internet access, networking computers, domain names, Web sites, security and protection, backup and archiving, and more. The second presentation covered "Internet Medical and Scientific Resources." Bradley Long, MLS, senior information services librarian at the Scott Memorial Library at Thomas Jefferson University, highlighted databases, full-text information resources, evaluating medical Web sites, document delivery, and more.

During "The Business of Freelancing," AMWA-DVC member Brian Bass provided insider's tips on fee setting (including how to earn more), contracts, invoicing, and liability issues. Bass is president of Bass Advertising & Marketing, Inc. and chair of the AMWA-DVC Princeton Conference.

AMWA member Lori Alexander, senior editorial manager at the American Society of Clinical Oncology, works regularly with freelancers. She shared "The Client-Freelance Relationship: The Employer/Client Perspective," including expectations of freelancers and their clients and some basic rules for making the relationship a success.

Look for detailed recaps of each workshop presentation in the next issue of the *Delawriter*. Much thanks to Freelance Workshop Chair Dorit Shapiro, who planned and ran the workshop virtually single-handedly.

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Delawriter

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new and existing texts into electronic databases, the NLM indexers use a controlled vocabulary of MeSH (Medical Subject Heading) terms. The NLM's indexing efforts have made simultaneous Web searches across multiple databases a reality, not just for professional researchers, but also for the general public.

The NLM Gateway (<http://gateway.nlm.nih.gov/gw/Command>) leads to PubMed and MEDLINEplus, as well as many other destinations. Interested in the history of medicine? The NLM Web site offers "Profiles in Science" (<http://profiles.nlm.nih.gov/>). Want to know which consumer products may be hazardous to your health? Check out the new household products database available at TOXNET (<http://toxnet.nlm.nih.gov/>). You can access information about 8500 clinical trials, half of them still open, through ClinicalTrials.gov. The Visible Human Project (http://www.nlm.nih.gov/research/visible/visible_human.html) allows you to see three-dimensional color representations of the human body on-line.

Searching these databases is relatively straightforward, but certain techniques can make searches more effective and efficient. Janet Zipser, also from NLM, offered a demonstration of PubMed/MEDLINE capabilities. She stressed the importance of using natural language phrases as search terms without the addition of connectors. (For instance, use the phrase "cardiac surgery," not "cardiac + surgery" or "cardiac and surgery" to achieve the best results.) A new feature added in the past year is the ability to e-mail retrieved information in either HTML or text formats. Using the CUBBY feature, users can store search strategies (e.g., search terms) and request updates since the last search was conducted. Icons within search results indicate immediately whether

full text or abstracts are available for each citation. The "Related Articles" feature allows users to find the sources that are most closely related to the citation. To make full use of PubMed's features and learn search refinement techniques, users can take a tutorial (http://www.nlm.nih.gov/bsd/pubmed_tutorial/m1001.html).

From 1953 to 1965, the NLM indexed some 1.5 million biomedical manuscripts. These "old MEDLINE" citations have just recently become available to consumers. Another new Web site is Genetics Home Research (<http://ghr.nlm.nih.gov/>) which is a searchable genetic information site designed for laypeople. And MEDLINEplus is now available in Spanish. Zipser noted that a major focus at the NLM is the improvement of consumer health literacy, which directly impacts health outcomes.

Christina Valente is a Philadelphia-based freelance writer who specializes in medical and environmental communications.

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We also conducted a post-workshop survey this year. The results showed that freelancers felt the workshop was very useful. For example, on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 = poor and 5 = excellent) 97% of the survey respondents rated the workshop a 4 or 5. Respondents made comments such as:

- "Excellent workshop. Thanks for continuing this endeavor."
- "I'm very glad I attended, both for the information I learned and the people I had a chance to meet."

One person came from Washington, DC to attend the workshop and noted that it was worth the trip.

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Newton is on the Board of the Healthcare Business Women's Association and on the Corporate Advisory Council for Bloomsburg University's Institute for Interactive Technologies.

Ann Sherwood, PhD, is a freelance medical writer who lives in New Jersey.

BIOTERRORISM from 2

transportation, and the water supply.

Nuclear, chemical, and biologic weapons have all been used in ancient and modern history. Many countries have weapons of mass destruction, including Egypt, Iran, Iraq, North Korea, Libya, and Pakistan.

The CDC lists 95 biological and chemical disease agents. Some of the most dangerous agents are anthrax, botulism, plague, and smallpox. "There is no scientific or technical impediment to bioterrorism. The consequences of bioterrorism will be multiple and affect every aspect of life," said Dr. Maher.

Public Health Response to Bioterrorism

A comprehensive public health response to bioterrorism involves epidemiologic investigation, medical treatment/prophylaxis for the people affected by the attack, initiation of disease prevention measures, and environmental decontamination measures. The response requires a partnership and collaboration among local, state, and federal agencies and organizations.

The CDC is preparing public health agencies to deal with terrorist attacks. The federal government has a national strategic response/readi-

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

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ness plan, which funds some national, regional, state, and large city bioterrorism response efforts. Part of this is raising professional awareness of bioterrorism, and providing education and training in response to bioterrorism. Dr. Maher cautioned, however, that first responders are not prepared for bioterrorism attacks.

Dr. Maher is a member of the Chester County Bioterrorism Awareness/Response Capability Group. The group's initiatives include establishing regional communications, conducting emergency preparedness and South-east Pennsylvania emergency planning, and establishing a hospital support zone.

Lori De Milto is a freelance medical writer specializing in marketing communications.

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