

UPCOMING MEETING

Mixer at the Mutter Museum: September 17

Join us on Tuesday, September 17 for a Mixer/Networking Meeting at the Mutter Museum of the College of Physicians of Philadelphia. Located in Center City, Philadelphia, the Mutter Museum is internationally renown for its collection of 20,000 medical objects, including 900+ fluid-preserved anatomical and pathological specimens, 10,000+ medical instruments and apparati; about 400 anatomical and pathological models; about 200 items of memorabilia of famous scientists and physicians; and about 1,500 medical illustrations.

Explore the museum and get to know AMWA members during our Medical Fact Hunters Fame, a scavenger hunt for medical facts and oddities. The winning team will receive \$25 gift certificates to Barnes & Noble.

The College of Physicians of Philadelphia is an educational and cultural not-for-profit society that focuses on the changing role of physicians in contemporary society and vital issues such as bioethics, the relevance of medical history for today's policymakers, and the recognition that medicine is both an art and a science. The college provides continuing medical education for health care professionals and health care education and community services to the public.

Carpooling can be arranged for members upon request. See our Web site for more information (www.amwa-dvc.org).

Details

- Tuesday, September 17
5:30 to 9:00 pm
- The Mutter Museum
19 South 22nd Street
Philadelphia, PA
(215) 563-3737
www.collegephil.org
- Buffet menu: Carved roast beef and turkey sandwiches; cheeses, crackers, vegetables, dips, and fruits; Beer/wine/soda/juice bar

Reservations

- Cost:
\$35 per person with advance reservations
\$40 per person at the door
Includes the buffet and beer/wine/soft drinks bar
- To reserve your place, contact:
Kate Casano:
kate@casano.com,
(215) 483-1454

CALENDAR

- **Tuesday, September 17**—"Mixer at the Mutter Museum," Center City Philadelphia, PA
- **Wednesday, December 4**—Speaker and location to be announced
- **Saturday, January 18**—"Freelance Workshop," Details to be announced
- **Tuesday, March 11**—Speaker and location to be announced
- **May**—Princeton Conference
- **Wednesday, June 4**—Annual Business Meeting; speaker and location to be announced

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Medical Science Undone by the Pen



Michael R. Cohen spoke about medical errors

Medical writers have a role to play in preventing medical errors, according to Michael R. Cohen, RPh, MS, ScD, from the Institute for Safe Medication Practices, a non-profit organization that provides education about adverse drug events and their prevention. Cohen outlined the problems, and offered some solutions, at the June 13 AMWA-DVC meeting in Langhorne, PA.

The 1999 Institute of Medicine report *To Err is Human: Building a Safer Health System* showed that medical errors were a serious problem and called for a re-design of systems and making safety a national priority. Despite efforts at every level of health care to reduce medical errors, problems remain.

Many medical errors occur during the ordering process. According to a 1995 *JAMA* article, 56% of errors that resulted in preventable adverse drug events occurred in ordering. Barriers to effective communication are:

- Illegible handwriting,
- Dangerous abbreviations, dose designations, and symbols,
- Verbal orders, and
- Ambiguous orders.

Sound-alike, Look-like Names

Many problems are related to nomenclature. Sound-alike, look-alike medications cause more than one third of reported medication errors and 29% of pharmacy drug dispensing errors. More than 1,000 products have been confused with one another. Proprietary names, non-proprietary names, and suffixes are often confused.

One solution for look-alike names is to put the letters that differ in all capital letters so that they stand out (e.g., doBUTamine and doPAmine). Different indications of a product (e.g., pediatric and adult) should be clear.

Dangerous Abbreviations and Symbols

Dangerous abbreviations and symbols are used in prescriptions, labeling, advertising, research protocols, and reports. Do not abbreviate:

- Drug names,
- “QD” or “OD” for the word *daily*,
- Letter “U” for *unit*,
- “îg” for *microgram* (use mcg),
- “QOD” for *every other day*,
- “sc” or “sq” for subcutaneous,
- “a” or “&” for *and*,
- “cc” for *cubic centimeter*, and
- “D/C” for *discontinue* or *discharge*.

Whenever possible, avoid decimals (e.g., use 500 mg instead of 0.5 g). Always lead, and never

See *MEDICAL ERRORS* on 3

THIS & THAT

Tips, resources, trivia, and more on style, grammar, typography, resources . . . from members of AMWA-DVC

Avoid Hazardous Writing

At the June AMWA-DVC meeting, Dr. Michael Cohen presented a variety of ways that careless writing can present hazards for patients. One such hazard lies in the use of units containing the Greek letter μ (“mu”), meaning *micro*. Many document management systems in use today still have trouble translating this letter in the correct font. If a μ inadvertently gets converted to an *m*, the change from micrograms to milligrams, for example, could result in gross overdosage.

A simple way to avoid this is to use mcg instead of μg . You can also spell out *micro*, as in microL. Please note: the lower case *u*, tempting though it may be, is not an acceptable substitute for μ .

From Robert Hand

Sales Tax for Freelancers in Pennsylvania

Figuring out whether you need to pay sales for freelance writing and editing services isn't easy. Did you know that if you work in Pennsylvania, you can request a letter from the Department of Revenue (717-787-1382) that clearly defines your tax status? Just send a letter outlining your business name, type of business (e.g., sole proprietorship, corporation), and type of work you do to:

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2002-2003 Board

On June 13, AMWA-DVC's 2002-2003 board took office:

- President:
Terry Ann Glauser, MD, MPH
- Immediate Past President:
Steve Collins
- President-elect:
Joan DeVinney
- Secretary:
Charles Sutherland, PhD
- Treasurer:
Robert Hand

Five committee chairs and two chapter delegates round out the board. The chairs are:

- Programs:
Joan DeVinney
- Membership:
Kate Casano, MHS
- Web site:
Elizabeth Puller
- Princeton Conference:
Brian Bass
- Newsletter:
Lori De Milto, MJ.

The delegates are:

- Lori De Milto and Eileen Moran.

Brief Board Bios

Glauser received her medical degree from Jefferson Medical College in 1981. She completed a residency in Emergency Medicine and practiced until 1993, when she matriculated at Johns Hopkins School of Hygiene and Public Health. Glauser began her medical writing career shortly after receiving her master's degree in public health in 1995. *AMWA member since 1996.*

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CAREER TRACKS

This column will highlight your professional achievements: promotions, new jobs, new businesses, awards, etc. All highlights must be 75 words or less and are subject to editing (only professional achievements will be included).

Send your news to Jennifer Long at longj@email.chop.edu.

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follow (e.g., Haldol .5 mg instead of Haldol 0.5 mg). Leave a space between the name and the dose (eg, Inderal 40 mg instead of Inderal40 mg).

Medical Writers Can Help

Medical writers help set the stage for some of these errors, according to Cohen. Although these problems occur primarily during the prescription ordering process, the style used by medical writers in labeling, research reports, and other publications contributes to errors. "Try to incorporate good habits in your writing and publishing," said Cohen. Other solutions include clearly printing prescriptions, direct order entry via computer and electronic prescriptions, reinforcing orders verbally, and never prescribing by volume, number of vials, amps, etc.

The Institute for Safe Medication Practices

The Institute for Safe Medication Practices (ISMP) is a non-profit organization that works with healthcare practitioners and institutions, regulatory agencies, professional organizations, and the pharmaceutical industry to provide education about adverse drug

AMWA-DVC to Offer Freelance Workshop

In January, AMWA-DVC will sponsor a Saturday morning freelance workshop for our many freelance members. The workshop will include three or four panelists and a question and answer session. January 18 is the tentative date. Possible topics include marketing your freelance business and dealing with the financial side of a freelance business. Look for details in e-mails, the program announcement, and the next issue of *Delawriter*.

If you have any suggestions for topics or panelists, contact Program Chair Joan DeVinney, jbdevinney@earthlink.net

events and their prevention. ISMP provides an independent review of medication errors that practitioners submit to the USP's national Medication Errors Reporting Program and is an FDA MedWatch partner. Mr. Cohen co-edits ISMP's Medication Safety Alert, a bi-weekly alert system, and is the author of the book *Medication Errors*.

For more information, log onto ISMP's Web site (www.ismp.org).

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DeVinney, owner of Eastgate Medical Writing, Phoenixville, PA, is a freelance medical writer and copyeditor. She has degrees in biology and education and writes articles for medical communications organizations, grant proposals, Web content, and health feature articles for a community newspaper, and does clarity editing for medical experts who are non-native English speakers. *AMWA member since 2000.*

Collins operates his own freelance writing business in Hatboro, PA, focusing on CME, sales training, and preparation of papers, in addition to a fair bit of non-medical (i.e., technical) writing. He has an extensive background in sales and marketing and an MS degree in molecular biology. *AMWA member since 1999.*

Sutherland is a freelance medical writer who spent 18 years as a biochemist in drug discovery and has a PhD in reproductive endocrinology. He has 6 patents and 28 scientific publications. Sutherland previously served as program chair. *AMWA member since 1997.*

Hand is a freelance medical writer based in Springfield, PA. He previously served as chapter delegate, newsletter editor, and president. He is currently in his second term as treasurer. *AMWA member since 1983.*

Casano is a full-time freelance medical writer, and also provides epidemiologic/data analysis services. She has served as membership chair since 2000. *AMWA member since 1998 and mid-1980s to mid-1990s.*

Puller is director of content for SimStar Internet Solutions in Princeton, NJ. She has a master's degree from Columbia University in Journalism with a concentration in health reporting and a bachelor's degree from the University of Washington in scientific and technical communication. Puller's previous work experience includes technical writing/editing in the biotech, pharmaceutical, and computer industries. *AMWA member since 1998.*

Bass is currently serving his third term on the Executive Committee of AMWA National. His first two terms were as administrator of development, where he was responsible for developing corporate financial support for AMWA. As administrator of public relations, Bass is now helping to promote AMWA both within and outside of the medical community. *AMWA member since 1994.*

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Commonwealth of
Pennsylvania
Department of Revenue
Office of Chief Counsel
Dept. 281061
Harrisburg, PA 17128.

From Joan DeVinney

Online Manual of Diagnosis and Therapy

Looking for an authoritative and easily accessible description of medical conditions, and how they're diagnosed and treated? Try *The Merck Manual of Diagnosis and Therapy* (www.merck.com/pubs/mmanual/). This searchable manual is a great resource for basic information.

From Lori De Milto

To share your tips, resources, trivia, etc. with other AMWA-DVC members, please e-mail your "This & That" to: lolid@voicenet.com.

Delawriter

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Why I Joined AMWA

By Peggy Stansfield

Not long ago I received a hot tip. At the time, I didn't know how hot a tip it was.

I was looking for freelance writing and editing opportunities. An acquaintance suggested that I look into the American Medical Writer's Association (AMWA). I found AMWA's Web site (www.amwa.org). I sent an e-mail to inquire about career opportunities in medical communications. The prompt and friendly response I received encouraged me to

continue my research. My e-mail was forwarded to other AMWA members who also contacted me promptly.

I joined AMWA after learning about the career potential of medical writing and the education and networking opportunities I would find through AMWA membership. AMWA is a friendly, helpful professional group that helped me launch a new career in medical communications.

Peggy Stansfield is a freelance marketing medical writer based in Cranbury, NJ.

Benefits of Getting Involved with AMWA

Education

- Core Curriculum Program:
Earn a certificate in one of five areas:
 - Editing/Writing
 - Education
 - Freelance
 - Pharmaceutical
 - Public relations/Marketing
- Advanced Curriculum Program:
In-depth consideration of medical writing
- *AMWA Journal*

Employment

- On-line Job Market (accessible to members only)
- Job Market Sheet (published 10 times a year)
- Freelance Directory

Networking

- AMWA-DVC meetings
- Annual and regional conferences, including AMWA-DVC's Princeton Conference
- Member directory

Lori De Milto Wins President's Award

On June 13, outgoing AMWA-DVC President Steve Collins presented the 2002 President's Award to Lori De Milto. Collins noted that De Milto's work in creating the *Toolkit for New Medical Writers* (available at www.amwa-dvc.org) has received widespread acclaim.

De Milto, who joined AMWA in 1997, has also served as secretary and newsletter reporter for the *Delawriter*. She is currently editor of the *Delawriter* and a chapter delegate.

A freelance marketing medical writer with 20 years of experience, De Milto's work includes newsletter articles, reports, Web content, direct mail, and medical essays. She has BA and MJ degrees in journalism from Temple University.

AMWA Student Memberships Now Available

AMWA student memberships are a great way to introduce potential medical writers to the field. Annual dues are just \$45 and all AMWA-DVC meetings are half price for students. Student members must be enrolled for at least six credit hours at an accredited institution of higher education.

Student members could be studying journalism, medical/scientific/technical communications, medicine, pharmacy, etc. Please tell any students you know who might be interested in medical

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De Milto is a freelance marketing medical writer. Her work includes newsletter articles, reports, and Web site content. De Milto has two degrees in Journalism. She previously served as secretary and a newsletter reporter. *AMWA member since 1997.*

Moran is a freelance writer. *AMWA member since 1992.*

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writing about our student memberships, and our September AMWA-DVC meeting.

See AMWA's Web site (www.amwa.org) for more information and a student membership application.

AMWA-DVC EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

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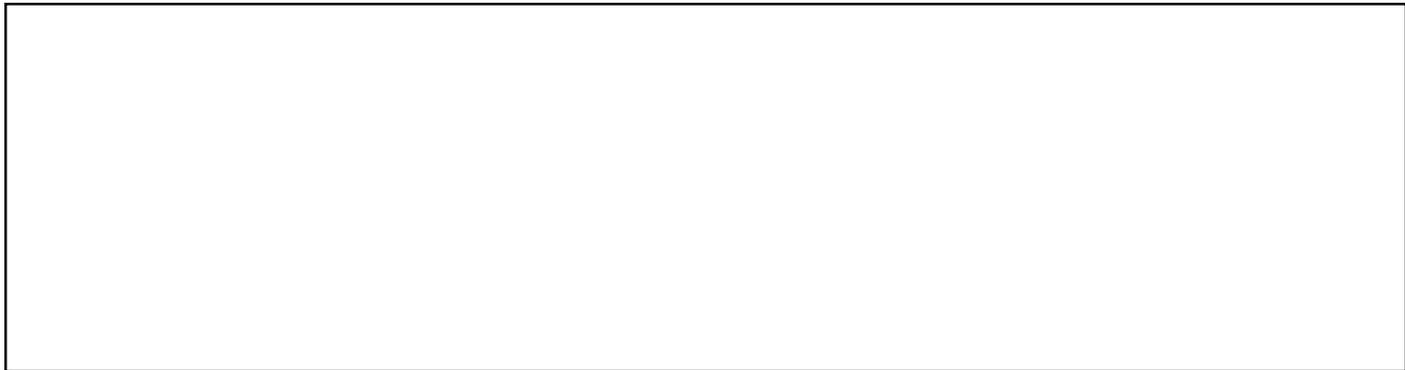
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Lori De Milto



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



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