

# What Excerpta Medica Expects From Freelance Medical Writers

## FROM THE 2007 FREELANCE WORKSHOP

*By Kent Steinriede, BA*

Although it often feels like it, freelance medical writing is not a solo high-wire act. It's collaborative teamwork with several key players supporting the writer. "They are really an important part of the whole process," said Rosa Real, MD, Medical Director at Excerpta Medica, who spoke at the AMWA-DVC Fifth Annual Freelance Workshop, on April 21, 2007 in Blue Bell, Pa.

Excerpta Medica, part of Elsevier, is a medical communications agency in Bridgewater, N.J. Real and Joanna Bligh, MEd, RT, CMA, a senior medical writer and editor, shared their wish list for freelance writers in their presentation, "What Excerpta Medica Expects From Freelance Medical Writers."

Ideally, Excerpta Medica likes to have a stable of about 10 versatile freelance writers that it can call on frequently. The agency is looking for writers with:

- At least 5 years professional writing experience
- PhD, Pharm D, MPH, MS, clinician NP, PA, RN, or a BA in journalism
- Accessibility
- Organizational skills
- Creativity
- Responsibility
- A great attitude.

So how does a freelance writer break into Excerpta Medica? "The key is professionalism," Bligh said. And be formal. A little courtesy will go a long way. "Make your first contact with a perspective agency a beautiful thing."

When making an e-mail introduction, be considerate of your audience and make a good impression. Make sure that the e-mail letter is formal, concise, and copyedited. Use the proper titles and know what they stand for. Don't address a MEd as "Dr." In follow-up communication, use the format of the sender. If the communication becomes less formal, make sure that this initiated by the perspective client.

Next, tell the reader your own educational background and experience. Indicate the therapeutic areas in which you have experience and interest, as well as the types of projects you have worked on in the past. If you've published articles or papers, tell how many.

Once Excerpta Medica agrees to work with a writer, he/she becomes part of a team that includes a medical editor, medical director, program manager, medical director, and Excerpta Medica's client. The project will begin with a conference call with several team members to discuss the format, content, client's message, timeline, number of drafts, and pay for the writer.

As the project moves along, there should be a free-flow of communication between the writer and the team. However, remember that everyone is busy. The writer should avoid superfluous e-mail messages, especially about issues that have already been agreed upon and discussed. Read the documents before you fire off an e-mail message, Bligh said.

Respecting deadlines is a sign of professionalism. However, if a writer sees that he/she will have trouble meeting a deadline, the team should be made aware of it as soon as possible. Most importantly, stay in touch, especially if a manuscript is late. "What we don't like is when the freelance writer disappears," Bligh said.

Writers who can accept constructive criticism are on the agency's wish list. Excerpta Medica wants to establish long-term relationships that will benefit the agency and the writer. "That's the whole point," Real said. "Everybody wants to be better."

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