

DELAWRITER

The quarterly newsletter of AMWA-DVC

Fall, 2023



AMWA-DVC welcomes our new Executive Committee officers for President and President Elect: Congratulations to Deborah Anderson, PhD, and Jennie G. Jacobson, PhD, CMPP. Mark Bowlby continues in his role as Treasurer through June 2024, and Suzanne Bujara, MBA, continues as secretary.

In other volunteer news, we welcome Tara Rachinsky, PhD, who has stepped up as Communications Chair, and Laura Sheppard, MBA, who is now Program Chair.

Volunteer Corner

Showcasing members who contribute time, energy, and expertise to AMWA's Delaware Valley Chapter

by Jacqueline M. Mahon, MA

Skating to Success with Ambition and Curiosity

The Delaware Valley Chapter (DVC) website (www.amwa-dvc.org) is crisp, clear, and fun thanks to Monica Nicosia, PhD, who has been website chair since 2020. The website makes it easy to see how to get involved, contact chapter leaders, and try volunteering. The “Resources” tab alone can keep a new medical writer busy for a long time. During 2020, Monica co-chaired with Janet Manfre, the previous website chair, to learn the position. The DVC website had been coded years before, when a skilled web developer/designer was required to build and update internet pages. It was difficult to work with compared to newer, layperson-friendly, website-building platforms. “I had created my business website,” notes Monica, “So after researching various options, I proposed to our chapter officers that I’d build a new DVC website with the same platform I had used before.” As a result of Monica’s effort, *Delawriter* issues are posted with ease, and emails are automatically forwarded from interested members to appropriate leaders. “The pandemic had just hit, so I had time and nervous energy on my hands,” Monica says. It was a challenging and engrossing project.



Building the chapter website tapped a creative well in Monica from which, in her early teens, also sprang a lifelong athletic interest.

In 1991, after completing a PhD in Cellular and Developmental Biology at Stony

Brook University (Stony Brook, NY) Monica embarked on a postdoc journey, first at the Wistar Institute in Philadelphia and then at the University of Pennsylvania. Monica did not thrive during 4 years of trying to find a research niche as a postdoc to help launch her dream of obtaining a tenure-track position. She explains, “At that time postdocs were in limbo with poor pay, little respect, and no personal/vacation time benefits or health insurance. You were treated like a technician, and the expectation was that you were tied to your bench for 14 hours a day.” With a husband, a baby, and the desire to have a life outside the lab, Monica became disinclined to be patient with arbitrary rules imposed by a principal investigator who had a lovely lab and interesting research, but a completely different understanding of life-work-balance. She quit her last post-doc position. “I didn’t have plans for an alternative career, but after three postdoc positions, I realized that the long haul to a tenure-track faculty position wasn’t for me.”

One day when she was at Wistar, Monica explored the neighborhood and wandered into the nearby Penn Ice Rink. She had skated only a few times in the previous 5 years, and her curiosity was piqued. Soon after, she began skating during public sessions that coincided with her gel electrophoresis experiments, which had to run by themselves for hours. Seeing adults and not only children receiving lessons, she hired a coach to learn proper techniques and, eventually, how to spin and do simple single jumps. The athleticism and freedom she experienced on the ice were exhilarating.

Eventually job-hunting efforts were successful, and in 1996 Monica started an entry-level medical writer position at a small medical communications (med-comm) agency. While she had experience researching and writing manuscripts under her own name, now she also was communicating with clients and creating conference reports, slide presentations, sales rep training, and other content. Soon she was the managing editor of two quarterly med-comm publications for clinicians, and her responsibilities expanded from there over 9 years with this firm. Her skating hobby also grew. After intense work hours building a new career, she took to the rink at night.

Of interest, Monica directed the IT department at this firm for 4 years. This work explains her facility with IT and her confidence in taking over the DVC website. By 2004 she was directing continuing-education projects and had drifted away from hands-on medical writing. Monica relates, “I’d been toying with the idea of starting my own medical-writing business. I wanted to be a writer, not a manager.” After twice attending the AMWA-DVC Freelancer Workshop (offered every year in March), she gained the confidence to take the leap. In 2005, Monica started Science Wordsmith from her home office in Bryn Mawr, PA, with projects from her previous employer and contacts to get her started. She was a freelancer for 9 years.

As a freelancer, Monica got involved in researching and writing health technology assessments (HTAs), and between 2014 and 2016 she took on a full-time remote position with Hayes, Inc, to focus on HTAs. But eventually she missed being her own boss and the variety of projects available through freelancing, and returned to that world as Nicosia Medical Writer, LLC. Currently, she mainly works on manuscripts for journal submission, abstracts/posters, and HTAs. What draws her to these types of work? “I like instituting a logical sequence to tell the story, accurately report data, and align the information for the target journal’s requirements and style,” Monica says.

After returning to freelance medical writing, her involvement with AMWA-DVC intensified. She was chapter Secretary for two years and then took over the website. She has also presented at the DVC Freelancer Workshop and the national AMWA annual conference (a list of these talks may be found at www.nicosiamedicalwriter.com/portfolio). Her most recent self-authored publication is: A medical writer’s guide. Working on clinical research manuscripts for submission to peer-reviewed medical journals. *AMWA J.* 2023;38:12-20.

Meanwhile, Monica’s ice-skating passion increased. She has worked with the same coach for 20 years and has been competing with other adults in Singles Freestyle and other categories. Monica clarifies that her skating is well below the televised, elite level. Adult skating competitions are organized by age group and skill level. “It’s

super nerve-wracking, and you're kind of terrified when you compete," she notes. "At the start, facing the judges feels a bit like being in front of a firing squad. But it's exciting," she laughs, "because it's a huge achievement, and you feel more motivated afterward. You recognize what you've done and think about how you can improve. Also, the adult skating community is full of fun and supportive people."

Monica was born in the Philippines from Italian parents with diplomatic passports; her father was a career diplomat in the Italian foreign service. After living in various countries, the family moved to Toronto, Canada, where she completed 8th through 11th grade. One year she and her siblings received ice skates as Christmas presents, and soon Monica was skating at a public rink for 75 cents and admiring Dorothy Hamill, who won the gold medal for women's figure skating in the 1976 Olympic Winter Games in Innsbruck, Austria. Monica's interest in figure skating grew at Carleton College in Northfield, MN, where she could skate outdoors during the winter. There, she took her first group figure-skating lessons for gym class freshman year.

Now, she trains most days and competes about five times per year. She chooses the music, and with her coach and choreographer aims to create an entertaining and inspiring performance that looks effortless despite its difficulty. Having one's own business allows the pursuit of such endeavors, which would likely be constrained by the regular hours of full-time employment.

Having worked freelance for so many years, Monica has many key tips for freelancers. Here are a few:

1. Do not burn bridges with previous employers or clients.
2. Repeat business from the same clients is important for the success of your freelance business.
3. Argue against unreasonable sections in contracts; these have become more common, and you can try to counter that they are not necessary.



Adult Nationals competition, 2022.

Jacque Mahon, MA, is owner of Acorn Freelance in Philadelphia and has been a writer of medical education and pharmaceutical communications for 26 years.



AMWA-DVC Networking Dinner at AMWA 2023 Conference in Baltimore, Maryland

Catch up with old friends and make new ones

Thursday, October 26, 2023

Program co-chairs: Laura Sheppard, MBA, MA, and Don Harting, MA, MS

Join us! We have reservations for 10 people at each of the following 2 restaurants:

- Apropoe's (within the conference hotel)
- The Oceanaire Seafood Room (a few blocks from the conference hotel)

Reservations are for 6:30 pm EDT.

Cost: There is no registration fee. Each person will pay their own restaurant bill, including gratuity.

You must register to reserve a seat at your preferred restaurant. **Registration will close at 5:00 pm EDT on Thursday, October 25, 2023.**

See this link for details and to register: <https://www.amwa-dvc.org/events>

CALL FOR WRITERS



I invite you to write an article about one of the AMWA National Conference sessions for the Winter 2024 issue of the Delawriter. Please email your first and second choices by November 10 to delawriter@amwa-dvc.org for consideration.

Thank you! Jacquie Mahon, Managing Editor

Presentations by AMWA-DVC Members at the 2023 AMWA Conference in Baltimore

Support your local colleagues at the 2023 national conference. Enjoy!

AMWA-DVC Member	Education Session Title	Date
Dan Bilodeau	Navigating the Evolving Transparency and Disclosure Landscape in 2023 and Beyond	Oct 26
Mark Bowlby	Variations in Investigational New Drug (IND) Applications Presented via Case Studies	Oct 27
Helen Forwood	Roads Leading to Approval: The Right Level of Detail for CMC Submissions	Oct 27
Art Gertel	Shackleton's Ghost Writer — Are Authorship Standards Always Important?	Oct 26
Donald Harting	Pursuing Excellence in Medical Writing for Continuing Education in the Health Professions: A Competency Model	Oct 26
Elizabeth Kukielka	Educating the Next Generation of Medical Communicators: Strategies for Development of a University Level Course	Oct 26
Monica Nicosia	Jam Session for Medical Writers and Editors Who Work on Research Manuscripts	Oct 27
Mandy Pennington	Take the Leap! Steps to Integrate AI into Your Work	Oct 26
Workshops (require pre-registration and fee)		
Elizabeth Brown	#11: Project Management	Oct 25
	#13: Lean Authoring	Oct 26
Art Gertel	#08: Fundamentals of Ethics and Practical Applications in Clinical Research	Oct 25
	#14: Do More With Less Faster: Project Management for Medical Communicators	Oct 26
Cyndy Kryder	#10: Visual Communication	Oct 25
Janet Novak	#04: Principles and Practice of Visual Data Presentation	Oct 25



For more information and to register: <https://www.amwa.org/page/Conference>

**Annual Freelance Workshop
March 2024**

The annual **AMWA-DVC Freelance Workshop** features extraordinary opportunities for learning and networking for seasoned, new, and aspiring freelance medical writers and editors. The Workshop will be packed with practical tips.

- Hear from speakers who are experienced freelancers
- Select from several roundtable sessions
- Access handouts and meeting recording

More details coming soon about this **March 2024** event.

Opportunity:

AMWA-DVC is looking for volunteers to assist with planning the 2024 Freelance Workshop. This is a great opportunity to contribute to AMWA-DVC, and doing so will give you and your freelance business desirable exposure.

Join us! If interested in volunteering, please contact the Freelance Workshop co-chairs: Helen Fosam, PhD, and Ndiya Ogba, PhD, via <https://www.amwa-dvc.org/about>



Holiday Networking & Socializing event on January 31, 2024

Watch this space for details about upcoming festivities!

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