

The quarterly newsletter of the American Medical Writers Association—Delaware Valley Chapter

UPCOMING MEETING

“An Evening with Dear Edie”: September 30

Do you have a plethora of Post-It notes or little slips of paper with burning questions about English usage? “Dear Edie” will entertain those perplexing questions that you’ve always wanted to ask at AMWA-DVC’s season opener on Tuesday, September 30 in Philadelphia, Pa. Come to this freewheeling conversation and be Edified!

Our speaker, Edith Schwager, is well known to AMWA members as “Dear Edie,” creator of the column of that name in the *AMWA Journal* and one of AMWA’s most popular workshop presenters. She is revered as the last word on medical English usage and abuse. Her workshops are famous for her cogent explanations and illustrations, always couched with wit and good humor. Edie is a freelance writer, teacher, and editor, specializing in medicine, pharmaceuticals, and English usage. She is the author of two books: *Medical English Usage and Abuse* (Oryx Press) and *Better Vocabulary in 30 Minutes a Day* (Career Press). She is the executive and copy editor of more than 40 books and 2,000 articles, as well as former editor of *AMWA Medical Communications* (forerunner of the *AMWA Journal*).

She has taught more than 250 workshops and presentations on English usage and abuse for medical and other professional writers and editors, pharmaceutical firms, publishers, physicians, nurses, and other audiences, including the US Food and Drug Administration, the Public Relations Society of America, and Rowan University. She has served AMWA as president of the Delaware Valley Chapter and in other offices. AMWA has honored Edie for her magnificent achievements with a Fellowship, the AMWA President’s Award, DVC’s President’s Award, the Swanberg Distinguished Service Award, and the Golden Apple Award. Other organizations have honored her as well.

Details

- Tuesday, September 30
5:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.
- Renaissance Philadelphia Hotel
Airport
500 Stevens Road
Philadelphia, Pa.
1-800-359-5672

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

CALENDAR

- **Thursday, September 18 to Saturday, September 20**—Annual Conference, Miami, Fla.
- **Tuesday, September 30** —“Dear Edie,” Philadelphia, Pa.
- **November**—Meeting, topic, speaker, and location to be determined
- **Saturday, January 17**—Annual Freelance Workshop
- **March**—Meeting topic, speaker, and location to be determined
- **Saturday, April 17**—Annual Princeton Conference
- **June**—Meeting topic, speaker, and location to be determined

Inside

Bridging the Digital Divide	2
New Executive Committee	3
Effective Web Research	3
The Perils of Spell-Check	4

Bridging the Digital Divide

By *Lori De Milto*

BeSmart! is a campaign by The College of Physicians of Philadelphia and the Free Library of Philadelphia to provide Delaware Valley residents with access to current, reliable, and jargon-free medical, health, and wellness resources. AMWA-DVC members learned all about the campaign when neurosurgeon Thomas W. Langfitt, MD, a Senior Fellow in the management department at the Wharton School and a member of The College of Physicians, spoke at the June 4 meeting in St. Davids, Pa.

Through the ages, physician knew best and patient information was limited. Americans had little control over their health, largely due to lack of information. That began to change 30 years ago, when the preventive health movement emerged, spurred by epidemiology studies that showed the link between disease and lifestyle. Second opinions were encouraged. The media increased its coverage of health issues.

Some physicians welcomed well-informed patients. Then managed care generated another revolution, impacting the diagnosis and treatment of patients, as well as the amount of time physicians could spend with patients. "The business of healthcare intruded between patients and their physicians," said Dr. Langfitt.

In 2000, The College of Physicians, the oldest medical society in the U.S., began a strategic review of its mission and future work. "We concluded that the most ominous and least recognized problem is a growing breach between the health care system and patient, especially between physicians and patients."

The new era of consumer information and education via the Internet has the potential to help heal

AMWA-DVC to Sponsor 2nd Annual Freelance Workshop and 7th Annual Princeton Conference

AMWA-DVC will once again sponsor two popular educational events: the Freelance Workshop and the Princeton Conference. The Freelance Workshop, started last year, will be held on Saturday, January 17. The Princeton Conference will be held on Saturday, April 17.

Freelance Workshop

Last year's Freelance Workshop was a great success, with attendance exceeding the maximum. The format, topics, and locations for the 2nd Annual Freelance Workshop are being planned. Dorit Shapiro is serving as workshop chair. If you would like to help out, or

have suggestions for the workshop, contact Dorit at DoritShapiro@yahoo.com.

Princeton Conference

The Princeton Conference is always a lively and educational event, offering credit and non-credit workshops and other opportunities, such as last year's freelance shuffle. Brian Bass continues as our Princeton Conference conference chair. If you would like to help out, or have suggestions for the workshop, contact Brian at bam509@optonline.net.

the breach between physicians and patients. Evidence that health communications elevates peoples' awareness of their risk for disease and their response to those risks is mounting. The Pew Internet and American Life Project concluded that 75 million Americans went online for health information in the prior year. Of people surveyed by the project:

- 50% said the information improved their personal health or health knowledge.
- 80% had limited knowledge of how to access Internet health information.
- 50% thought information was credible.
- 4 out of 5 were worried about the reliability of the information they found.

The College of Physicians' review resulted in the decision to create a regional health information system, BeSmart! This built upon the college's Community Health Information Center, which contained books, periodicals, and Internet access and was staffed by

librarians who helped users find information.

BeSmart, launched in July 2003, has four components:

1. Health Newspaper: featuring what's new in health in the Delaware Valley and focusing on one disease per month.
2. Core Content: 200 Web sites, focusing on 10 national Web sites with established track records (e.g., MedLine Plus).
3. Inventory of Delaware Valley Services and Resources: linked to disease information.
4. Interactive Online Assistants (IOAs): volunteers (e.g., retired librarians and physicians) who help users find information. The user e-mails the IOA and has a real-time conversation with him/her.

A seminal article in JAMA in 2000 highlighted the digital divide:

New Executive Committee

On June 4, AMWA-DVC's 2003-2004 board took office. Kate Casano, MHS, moved up to president, Terry Ann Glauser, MD, MPH, became immediate past president, Lori De Milto, MJ, was elected president-elect, and Maitland Young, MD, was elected treasurer. Charles Sutherland, PhD, continues on in the second year of his two-year term as secretary.

Five committee chairs and two chapter delegates round out the executive committee. The chairs are: Andrea Laborde, MD: programs; Kate Casano, MHS: membership (temporary); Christine Sokolowski Yanicek: Web site; Brian Bass: Princeton Conference; and Lori De Milto, MJ: newsletter. De Milto and Casano serve as chapter delegates to AMWA national.

Brief Board Bios

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

Terry Ann 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. Terry began her medical writing career shortly after receiving her Master's degree in public health in 1995. *AMWA member since 1996.*

Lori De Milto is a freelance marketing medical writer with 20 years of experience. Her work includes newsletter articles, brochures, reports, and Web site content for clients such as a major

See BOARD on 5

AMWA-DVC to Offer New Jersey Satellite Meetings

This year, AMWA-DVC will be expanding programs by offering satellite meetings in Central New Jersey. The chapter had these meetings in the past and they were very successful. As information about dates, locations, and events become available, we'll notify members via e-mail, mail, and/or the *Delawriter*.

Kira Belkin is heading the Program Committee Satellite Meetings Subcommittee. If you would like to help her, or you have any ideas for locations or events, contact Kira at kbelkin@att.net.

Effective Web Research

By Peggy Stansfield

How much time do you spend searching for information on the Web? Do you often find yourself mired in inappropriate information? This article presents techniques to make your Web research more effective.

The Teaching Library at the University of California at Berkeley recommends a five-step search strategy that includes a "topic worksheet" (you can download it at www.lib.berkeley.edu/TeachingLib/Guides/Internet/Strategies.html):

1. Analyze your topic and decide where to begin. Use the topic worksheet to improve your search results. Start by jotting down the topic or subject you want to explore. Then, begin your pre-search analysis:
 - What unique words (distinctive names, abbreviations, or acronyms) are associated with your topic?
 - Can you think of societies, organizations, or groups whose Web sites might have information on your subject?
 - What other words are likely to be in *any* Web documents on your topic?
 - Do any of your *unique* words belong in phrases, in a certain order, like a cliché?

- Can you think of synonyms, variant spellings, or equivalent terms you would also accept in relevant documents?
- Can you think of any extraneous or irrelevant documents these words might pick up?
- What *broader* terms could your topic be covered by?

2. Pick the right starting place:

- Use a search engine (e.g., Google™) if you are searching for a distinctive word or phrase; enclose it in quotation marks.
- If you don't have a distinctive word or phrase try one or more terms or phrases enclosed in quotation marks.
- Try AltaVista's Boolean searching to narrow the aspect of a broad or common topic.
- To search for synonyms, equivalent terms, and variants choose search engines with Boolean* OR, truncation, or field limiting.
- Use subject directories to search for a broader concept of your term. Look for distinctive terms in subject directories.
- If you need an overview of your topic look for a specialized Subject

See WEB on 4

The Perils of Spell-Check

By Jennifer Long

When you're in a rush or working under a deadline, it's fast and convenient to make a few keystrokes on your computer and feel relatively secure that the spelling and grammar in your document is flawless. But if you frequently rely on your computer's spell and grammar checker, you may want to reconsider trusting the accuracy of your software – and you may want to consider dusting off the dictionary and grammar guides on your shelf.

A recent study conducted by the University of Pittsburgh revealed that relying on a computer's spell-check function can actually make your writing *worse* instead of better. More

than 30 undergraduate students were asked to proofread a one-page business letter – half of them using Microsoft Word's spell-check function, the other half using only their brains. Without using the spell checker, students with higher SAT scores reportedly made an average of five errors, compared to approximately 12 errors made by students with lower scores. With the software, students with higher verbal scores on the SAT reportedly made an average of 16 errors, while students with lower scores made 17 errors. The study illustrated that not only did spell-checking software identify errors in the text to be corrected, as it is designed to do, but it also reportedly identified some proper sentences and phrases as being grammatically incorrect.

Jennifer Long is the senior medical/science writer for the research institute of The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia and also works as a freelance writer and editor.

DIVIDE from 2

people need a 10th grade education to be able to access health information, but 48% of American adults can't access information at this level. BeSmart! is designed to bridge the digital divide. A pilot program is underway in Northeast Philadelphia, where the public library is next to the public health center. Patients at the health center receive an information prescription, which they "fill" at the library, with the librarian finding the appropriate information. "We're creating a new category of caregivers: information health caregivers," said Dr. Langfitt.

Election Results 2003-2004

Lori De Milto was elected president-elect and Maitland Young was elected treasurer. Kate Casano moved up to president. Chuck Sutherland continues as secretary. Thanks to Nominating Committee members Chuck Sutherland (chair), Steve Collins, Robert Hand, and Lyle Horn.

WEB from 3

Directory that focuses on it.

- If you are unsure where to start with your topic or need more information look for a Gateway* Page (subject guide) or try an encyclopedia in a Virtual Library.
 - Are you looking for data, facts, statistics, all of something, one of many like things, schedules, or maps? Try to find a specialized database on the Invisible Web.
 - Need an expert? Look for a specialized subject directory on your topic. E-mail the author of a good site. Ask a discussion group.
3. Learn from your search. Look through your search results for useful items you hadn't thought of.
 4. If one strategy doesn't work, try another. Switch between search engines and subject directories. Try databases and specialized directories.
 5. Use what you've learned. Return to previous strategies better informed.

See WEB on 5

Delawriter

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VOLUNTEERS WANTED

Do you want to:

- Gain visibility,
- Build your network, and
- Learn about job and freelance opportunities early?

Consider volunteering to help run AMWA-DVC. We have many opportunities to help. Most tasks take a few hours or less each month. Many can be done from your home or office. Volunteer work includes:

- **Membership Committee:** Our most pressing need is for a chair and members for our Membership Committee, which responds to inquiries from prospective members.
- **Program Committee:** Our Program Committee and its sub-committees—Princeton Conference, Freelance Workshop, and Satellite Meetings—all need volunteers for tasks ranging from organizing events to taking registrations for events to signing people in at events.
- **Web site:** Our Web site committee maintains and expands our chapter Web site.
- **Ad hoc tasks:** Volunteers help with other jobs as they come up.
- **Serving on the Executive Committee:** Members of the executive committee (the elected board and committee chairs) guide AMWA-DVC. Generally, members serve on committees before being appointed a committee chair or elected to the board.

To volunteer, contact the appropriate committee chair (see list on page 6) or contact Kate Casano at kate@casano.com.

BOARD from 3

health and health care foundation, an academic medical center, professional associations, and medical education companies. Lori has two degrees in Journalism. She previously served as AMWA-DVC secretary and a newsletter reporter. *AMWA member since 1997.*

Maitland Young is a freelance writer and healthcare consultant. Trained as a chemist, Maitland received two masters degrees and a doctorate in biochemistry and chemistry from Yale University. He has spent two decades in the healthcare industry, where he has held positions in clinical studies, quality assurance, scientific liaison with Japan, and R&D. Maitland completed AMWA's multidisciplinary certificate and served as AMWA-DVC program chair. *AMWA member since 1995.*

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

Andrea Laborde is a physician at MossRehab specializing in traumatic

brain injury. She is the special features editor for the *Journal of Head Trauma Rehabilitation*. *AMWA member since 2002.*

Christine Sokoloski Yanicek is a freelance writer who specializes in science and medical reporting and pharmaceutical advertising. She has a BA in Journalism from Rider College. She has worked as a general assignments reporter for two New Jersey newspapers, the editor of biotechnology and pharmaceutical trade publications, and a copywriter for print and web-based pharmaceutical advertising. Christine is co-founder of TCC Communications, which offers freelance writing and editing services to advertising agencies and pharmaceutical companies. *AMWA member since 2001.*

Brian Bass is the owner of Bass Marketing and Advertising. Brian has served on the boards of national and AMWA-DVC and is chair of the Princeton Conference. As of press time, he was off in the wilds of Alaska and was not available to provide an updated bio. Brian's quite friendly; if you want to know more, ask him at one of our meetings. *AMWA member for many years.*

WEB from 4

Terms Defined

The University of South Carolina's search engine tutorial, "Bare Bones," has more information about these terms and other useful information (<http://www.sc.edu/beaufort/library/bones.html>).

- **Boolean logic**, named for British mathematician George Boole (1815-1864), uses the operators: AND, OR, and NOT to link words and phrases to develop more precise search queries.

AND – narrows your search by retrieving only documents that contain

every one of the key words you enter. The more terms you enter, the narrower your search becomes.

OR – expands your search by returning documents in which either or both keywords appear.

NOT, AND NOT – limits your search by returning only your first keyword but not the second.

- **Field Searching** allows you to combine a major Web page field (title, domain, host, URL, or link) with your

See WEB on 6



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

6

WEB from 4

search term(s) to specify exactly where the search engine should look in a Web document (e.g., title: “Web search tutorial”).

- **Gateways** are collections of databases and informational sites, arranged by subject. Specialists assemble and review gateways.
- **Invisible Web** is the large portion of the Web that cannot be accessed by search engines such as password-protected sites, documents behind firewalls, and archived material.
- **Subject Directory** is a Web page that is annotated and classified by subject (e.g., www.lii.org or www.yahoo.com).

Peggy Stansfield is a freelance writer based in central New Jersey.

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