

AMWA-DVC Tours Clinical Skills Center at Jefferson

By Joyce Brazino

The September 25, 2008, meeting of the American Medical Writers Association–Delaware Valley Chapter (AMWA-DVC) was at the Rector Clinical Skills Center at Jefferson Medical College in Philadelphia. Dale Berg, MD, and Joseph Majdan, MD, hosted a tour of the center, which enables students to learn such skills as IV insertion and tracheal intubation on automated mannequins. “When I was a student, we learned to put catheters and IVs in at the bedside,” said Dr Berg. “It was only through some combination of grace and luck that we learned without causing complications. It shouldn’t happen that way. Only silly people learn on people.”

Tour participants observed two of the mechanical patients that are used to provide students with patient care practice: SimMan and Harvey the Heart Guy. With SimMan, students are able to practice skills such as intubation, ventilation, pulse checking, chest compression, cardiac defibrillation, urinary catheterization (using interchangeable male and female genitalia), and auscultation of heart, breath, and bowel sounds.

Dr Majdan demonstrated the capabilities of Harvey the Heart Guy, a mechanical patient that can simulate 27 cardiovascular conditions. Once a disorder is selected, students can listen to the corresponding heart sounds through an electronic stethoscope, palpate pulses, and record blood pressure. Instructors can also change the size of the heart, neck veins, and carotid

arteries to mimic the condition under study. “All of these structures have specific characteristics for various abnormalities,” said Dr Majdan, who broadcasted a variety of heart sounds through electronic stethoscopes for tour participants to hear.

Students not only perform procedures on mannequins, they also work with a group of 138 real people, known as *standardized patients*, who feign diseases ranging from carpal tunnel syndrome to schizophrenia. “We teach these patients all about the disease to the level of a third-year medical student,” said Dr Berg. “Their job is to add context and make the learning experience credible for students. It’s stagecraft.”

In addition to making the experience more real, standardized patients help students appreciate the importance of communication. “When everyday people tell them, ‘You were insensitive,’ ‘You didn’t give me time to talk,’ ‘You should have sat down to get to my level,’ or ‘You didn’t drape me right,’ they’re more inclined to believe it than they would be if I told them,” explained Dr Berg. “It’s about honing compassion.”

The two modalities—standardized patients and simulated patients—are often combined to provide the students with an optimal learning experience. For example, when students learn IV insertion, the standardized patient might use a third plastic arm and grimace to make the learning experience more realistic. “We’re teaching interpersonal and

technical skills all in one shot,” said Dr. Berg. “If we were only using plastic models, it would get old and boring pretty quickly.”

Students begin working in the Clinical Skills Center from day two of their first year. For example, after dissecting cadavers in the anatomy lab, they might examine standardized patients to locate the structures they have seen. “The ultimate goal is to translate what they learn in the lab to the bedside and, ultimately, to improve patient care,” said Dr Berg.

Joyce Brazino, RN, MPH, is a medical writer specializing in marketing communications for medical device manufacturers.

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Highlights From the Fall AMWA Board of Directors Meeting

By Barbara Rinehart and Lisa Breck

What a terrific Annual Conference October 23–25, 2008, in Louisville, Kentucky! There were 928 attendees with 120 attendees from AMWA-DVC. The board of directors met the afternoon before the start of the conference, and chapter delegates met after the board meeting to discuss issues related to chapter functions. AMWA is in great shape financially and organizationally, and gifted with talented volunteers.

Relevancy Changes to Bylaws

After a review of changes, which would make the national bylaws relevant to current practice, a vote occurred and revisions to the national bylaws were approved. Of note is the potential inclusion of a revised code of ethics. Visit www.amwa.org to review. After discussion, the AMWA-DVC revised bylaws were approved. Visit www.amwa-dvc.org/about for a copy of the latest bylaws.

Education

If you missed the “Dear Edie” webinar this year, visit the AMWA Web site to listen for free. Three other webinars are planned for 2009. The Science Fundamentals Certificate Program is up and running. New workshops are being planned and teachers are needed for the following 16 topics: introduction to digestive, endocrine, reproductive, respiratory, and integumentary systems; diseases of the digestive, cardiovascular, endocrine, immune, musculoskeletal, nervous, renal, reproductive, respiratory, special sense organ systems; and diagnostics and therapeutics. If you are interested in leading a workshop, fill out a willingness to serve form, available at www.amwa.org on the “Members Only” page, or contact Susan E. Aiello, DVM, ELS, at susan@words-world.net.

Chapter Greet & Go

One of the best networking opportunities at the annual conference is the Greet & Go cocktail reception. Because many AMWA chapters are geographically diverse, the Greet & Go allows members to network and meet other chapter members. For some, this is the only opportunity they have all year to meet members of their own chapter.

Although the AMWA-DVC is a very active chapter, the chapter is quite large. So a “Post-Greet & Go” dinner outing was orchestrated for members to continue their networking and conversations. Prior to the conference, an e-mail was sent to AMWA-DVC members attending the conference inviting them to participate by hosting or attending a dinner. Lori De Milto, Mary Howe, and Lisa Breck hosted dinners at local Louisville restaurants. AMWA-DVC members who participated in the Post-Greet & Go were very pleased to have made new acquaintances, and many continued their conversations throughout the conference. We hope to make this a tradition at future annual conferences.

Other News

- There is now an official AMWA LinkedIn group for networking at www.linkedin.com.
- The Index for past “Dear Edie” articles is complete. The index for the *AMWA Journal* is next.
- The endowment fund will focus on new projects; recommendations are welcome.
- AMWA is working in conjunction with educators at Towson University in Maryland regarding their Masters course in Professional Writing, biomedical writing track, as part of the

initiative for partnering with institutions of higher education.

- Don’t forget the pilot MD Consult benefit AMWA offers, which is available online at www.amwa.org under “Members Only.”

AMWA-DVC gratefully thanks our own Robert J. Bonk, PhD, for coordinating a superb Annual Conference. Thanks to all DVC members who helped pull off another terrific educational event. Kudos!

The next conference is slated for October 22–24, 2009, in Dallas, Texas. See you there.

Barbara Rinehart, MS, the current president of AMWA-DVC, is a freelance medical writer. Lisa Breck is president-elect for the 2008–2009 fiscal year and is president of Breck & Company, Inc, a medical marketing and communications company based in St. Davids, PA. Both are AMWA chapter delegates.

DVC Volunteer Corner

By Jennifer Maybin

We continue to appreciate the willingness of AMWA-DVC members to volunteer to help with PA and NJ meeting logistics and program development. You are awesome.

We’d like to especially thank Mary Howe for her work on updating the resources section of the AMWA-DVC Toolkit for New Medical Writers. Find a copy at www.amwa-dvc.org/toolkit.

If you are interested in volunteering to help with the upcoming Freelance Workshop or Princeton Conference, or any other opportunity, please contact Jennifer Maybin at volunteer@amwa-dvc.org.

AMWA-DVC Revises Bylaws

By Barbara Rinehart and Lori De Milto

Over the years, AMWA-DVC has greatly expanded programming and increased our use of technology (e-mail and our Web site) to better conduct chapter business. We recently updated our bylaws to reflect these chapter changes.

Overview of Revisions

The main revisions pertain to our Standing Committees (Article VI, Committees, Section 2). We revised our committee structure as follows:

- Education Committee—We split this into two committees: Princeton Conference Committee and Freelance Workshop Committee.
- Program Committee—We split this into two committees: Pennsylvania Program Committee and New Jersey Program Committee.
- We created a Web Site Committee. This committee will include publicity, which was formerly a separate committee.

We also made some other revisions, including:

- Replacing chapter “representative” with “delegate” to conform to national’s terminology
- Expanding the duties of the president-elect
- Adding “e-mail” as a way to communicate nominations for chapter offices and willingness to serve, as well as to notify members of amendments
- Changing some dates (eg, reports will be submitted to the Executive Committee before the winter/spring planning meeting instead of by April 15)

AMWA-DVC Members Vote to Accept Revised Bylaws

After review of the proposed revisions by the AMWA-DVC Executive Committee and other key volunteers, we notified our members about the proposed revisions in

early September and posted them to our Web site. At our meeting on September 25, 2008, a majority of the attending members voted to accept the proposed bylaws.

The AMWA National Board of Directors at the Annual Conference reviewed and approved the revised bylaws in October. This approval was required as the final step.

The Bylaws Revision Committee thanks everyone who contributed comments about these revisions, especially Marie-Therese Zenner for her eagle eye and insightful comments during these revisions.

Barbara Reinhart, MS, is a freelance medical writer and the current chapter president. Lori De Milto, MJ, is a freelance medical writer and chaired the Bylaws Revision Committee in 2008.

AMWA-DVC Freelance Workshop, April 25, 2009

Mark your calendars for the AMWA-DVC Freelance Workshop

Saturday, April 25, 2009

Normandy Farms, Blue Bell, PA

Not Getting Our E-mails?

If you aren't getting e-mails from us, add these e-mail addresses to your e-mail safe list to make sure you receive our announcements:

amwa-dvc-members@dudley.casano.com

amwa-dvc-announce@dudley.casano.com

Writing Health Care Newsletters for Today's "Google and Go" Generation

By Patrick Stephens

At the AMWA-DVC meeting held on December 3, 2008, in Yardley, Pennsylvania, Gail Rose spoke on "Writing Health Care Newsletters for Today's 'Google and Go' Generation." She is an editorial director at Baldwin Publishing in Lambertville, New Jersey, a custom publisher of health care marketing materials for consumers. Gail's presentation capitalized on her expertise in health care marketing and communications, with emphasis on tailoring health care newsletters towards today's audience.

"Readers have become cyberchondriacs," Gail stated, "with an estimated 160 million people online." Two out of three users research health topics. In fact, use of online search engines to obtain health care information is second only to seeking advice from a family physician. "The pro is that patients are now more empowered than ever with health care information," Gail noted. "The con is that patients are swamped with information that's inaccurate and, sometimes, scary." Clearly, today's health care professionals must gear their printed information towards an Internet-oriented audience.

To ensure complete audience coverage, Gail recommended providing newsletters in a mix of three media: print, Internet, and e-mail (ie, e-newsletter). Print is the best way to draw an audience to your Internet-based newsletter, and e-mail captures an audience missed by print and Internet newsletters.

Where to Start

According to Gail, use Google or Nielsen online to search common health care topics such as nutrition

and fitness, disease prevention, and pain management. When writing an article based on Internet-gathered information, check the facts because such information may be inaccurate. Obtain content through online libraries, other newsletters, or the Internet sites of health organizations such as the American Heart Association (www.americanheart.org) or the American Cancer Society (www.cancer.org).

How to Write Online

Internet readers, Gail believes, want to "skim, scan, and scam" so Internet newsletters must be designed accordingly. Regardless of the medium, readers want to access information quickly and easily.

For Internet newsletters, write in a casual, conversational style, compile an interactive layout, and employ search engine optimization (SEO). (According to the *Insider's Guide to SEO*, SEO is a "collection of methods to getting a Web site to rank higher in a search engine.") However, do not stuff your text by repeating key words over and over, hide key words by repeating them in a white font on a white background, or create awkward sentences by stuffing key words within them. Gail also suggested creating pages with photos, call-outs, captions, quotes, sidebars, or lists of five to seven items.

For print newsletters, consider an 8½-by-11-inch tri-fold. For e-newsletters, avoid subject lines that trigger spam filters such as "free," "refund available," or "click here." In addition, Gail suggested mixing media in health care communications—for instance, include a cooking video featuring a recipe for a postoperative diet.

Gail advocates inviting comments, conducting surveys, and tracking readership.

Patrick Stephens has ten years of experience writing for the biopharmaceutical and health care industries and is currently working at MediMedia, Inc in Yardley, PA.

Did You Know . . .

The Life Science Career Alliance (LSCA) was established in 2003 as a subsidiary of the Philadelphia Workforce Investment Board. Its mission is to maintain and increase the strength of the life sciences in the Delaware Valley by improving the life science workforce. LSCA is headquartered on Market Street in downtown Philadelphia. Visit LSCA online at www.lscalliance.org.

Boston, San Francisco, and North Carolina compete with Philadelphia for top talent in life sciences, and LSCA works to prevent a local brain drain. Pharmaceutical companies, medical device makers, major hospitals, community colleges, and universities work with LSCA to predict labor shortages and find ways to address them.

A combination of public and private funds enables the organization to carry out a variety of research and publishing activities in print and online. LSCA publishes a brochure listing 57 health care career opportunities, and despite Philadelphia's prominence as a biomedical publishing center, medical writing is nowhere on the list!

Thanks to Donald M. Harting, MA, ELS, for providing this information.

Trading the Pipette for a Pen: Advice for Students

By Elizabeth Manning

I joined AMWA in my last year of graduate school, and have subsequently attended two annual conferences and several local events sponsored by the Delaware Valley Chapter. Finally, after almost 10 years of working in a laboratory, I found solidarity in others who understood exactly what I meant when I said, “I want to be involved in science without physically doing it.”

When I was a student, I was concerned with how I would break into the medical writing field since the majority of my experience was based in the laboratory. Now However, it has now been over 2 years since graduation, and I am happily employed at a pharmaceutical company where I am responsible for contributing to clinical-trial-related activities and writing regulatory documents.

I now hope to provide some practical advice for students wanting to transition from the laboratory into medical communication careers.

Take Advantage of Educational Opportunities

While in a university setting, it is important to take advantage of the resources around you—including other departments. For example, the English department may offer courses on basic grammar or advanced writing and editing. If you are interested in clinically oriented careers, look into courses offered through the Medicine or Public Health Departments.

Membership fees to professional organizations are often significantly lower for students. Many of these organizations (such as AMWA and the Drug Information Association) offer a variety of training courses on topics ranging from writing skills to drug development.

Network and Review Job Postings

Another benefit of joining professional organizations is the opportunity to network. I have found that AMWA members have been extremely helpful in discussing how they became involved in medical writing and describing their diverse projects. Moreover, as a member of AMWA, you can access job listings through the AMWA Web site (www.amwa.org). You’ll learn about the different types of medical writing opportunities and the qualifications you need to be successful.

Seek Out Writing and Editing Projects

Many potential employers of medical writers require writing samples, so build a portfolio that consists of scientific publications, project summaries/abstracts, articles, or writing samples from classes. Talk with your advisors about your interest in gaining writing and editing experience by collaborating on scientific manuscripts or review articles. You may also be able to review or contribute to grant

proposals or clinical study protocols. Also consider becoming involved in your school or local newspaper and AMWA publications.

Highlight Relevant Experience in Your Resume

Students often include technical aspects of their research projects on a resume, but fail to remember the importance of emphasizing communication-related activities.

For example, listing publications and presentations in your resume provides evidence of written and oral communication skills and highlights your ability to process and present scientific information to varied audiences. Mentioning your participation in journal clubs showcases your ability to critically evaluate manuscripts, research material from various therapeutic areas, and present your findings. Furthermore, creating a “Relevant Training” section in your resume demonstrates your motivation and interest in medical communication, and allows you to incorporate specific keywords into your resume.

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**News and notes from the
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Summary

My advice is simple—it is never too early to start thinking about your post-graduation career path. By networking and reviewing job postings, you may learn about what types of medical communication positions interest you and the basic requirements needed to get the job. By taking additional training courses and building a portfolio, you will gain experience and strengthen your resume. By understanding the value of your education and the relevance of your experience, you will gain confidence and improve your marketability as you transition from the laboratory into medical writing.

Elizabeth A. Manning, PhD, is a Clinical Research Scientist at Akros Pharma Inc in Princeton, NJ.

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