

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

UPCOMING MEETING

Regulatory Writing: Skills for Success, Russell D. Hunter, RAC — December 6

AMWA-DVC's December dinner meeting will feature a talk by Russell D. Hunter, RAC entitled "Regulatory Writing: Skills for Success." Mr. Hunter is a regulatory affairs specialist with MDS Pharma Services in King of Prussia and has U.S. Regulatory Affairs certification. He has extensive experience related to regulatory, clinical, medical device, and risk management medical writing.

The meeting will be held at the Sheraton Park Ridge in King of Prussia, Pa. Dinner will consist of tortellini appetizer, salad, choice of sautéed chicken breast or seared salmon filet over sautéed spinach, and seasonal fruit tart. Please specify choice of entrée with your registration.

Details

- Tuesday, December 6: 5:30 p.m. Networking, 6:00 p.m. Mr. Hunter's presentation, 7:00 p.m. Dinner.
- Sheraton Park Ridge Hotel and Conference Center
480 North Gulph Road, King of Prussia, PA 19406.
(610) 337-1800
- Cost with advance registration: Members: \$40, Nonmembers: \$45, Students: \$10.
At the door: \$10 more, SPACE PERMITTING.

Registration

- Please mail your registration with a check payable to AMWA-DVC to:
AMWA-DVC, c/o Lesley Macphee
1011 Waltham Road
Berwyn, PA 19312
- If you have questions, please email Christina Valente at Programs@amwa-dvc.org or call (215) 567-1288.

Advance registration must be received no later than Tuesday, November 29. Cancellations must be received by midday on November 29. After November 29, AMWA-DVC must insist that you remit payment whether or not you attend the program, as we incur costs based upon advance registration.

CALENDAR

- **Tuesday, December 6, 2005** — "Regulatory Writing: Skills for Success," Sheraton Park Ridge Hotel and Conference Center, 480 North Gulph Road, King of Prussia, Pa.
- **January 14** — "2006 Freelance Workshop," Sheraton Park Ridge Hotel and Conference Center, 480 North Gulph Road, King of Prussia, Pa.
- **February** — N.J. meeting (Topic, speaker, date, and location to be determined)
- **March** — Pa. meeting (Topic, speaker, date, and location to be determined)

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Life in a Medical Examiner's Office

By *Lori De Milto*

Is a real medical examiner's office anything like that portrayed in the popular television show *CSI*? "Well, we do go to the scene. But it takes us longer than a half hour to get a lab result," quipped Camden County Medical Examiner, Paul Hoyer, MD. Dr. Hoyer, a forensic pathologist, gave attendees at AMWA-DVC's September 13 meeting an insider's view of the Camden County Medical Examiner's Office.

Dr. Hoyer began his presentation and tour in the office, explaining that in the state of New Jersey, medical examiners (MEs) must be licensed physicians. As a forensic pathologist, Dr. Hoyer is trained in determining how people died.

About 1,200 cases pass through the Camden County ME's office each year. Most of the remains are human; however, the ME's office has been called to scenes where the remains turned out to belong to bears, cows, horses, pigs, or even chickens. The office staff includes two permanent part-time physicians and three additional physicians who provide coverage when necessary.

New Jersey state law requires investigation into the circumstances surrounding death. "It's an intellectually interesting job to determine how someone died," said Dr. Hoyer. In cases where the deceased died under medical care, the Camden County ME's office just confirms the cause of death. People who die at home or under questionable circumstances—about 400 each year—are brought into the ME's office.

Of the approximately 230 autopsies performed in Camden County each year, MEs determine that nearly one third of the deaths are

due to homicide. Dr. Hoyer noted, however, that determining what constitutes a crime is a bit arbitrary, since many deaths are related to motor vehicle accidents involving violations of the motor vehicle code by the deceased or another person.

Dr. Hoyer led attendees through the facility, showing them the loading dock where bodies are brought in and the 17-year-old station wagon used to transport those bodies. Back inside the building, attendees stood in a room with a 12-body refrigerator, and a 4-body freezer. The unsettling smell of formaldehyde permeated the room, while Dr. Hoyer discussed how his office would handle a disaster that resulted in more than 20 bodies. Although there is a federal program to provide assistance in such cases, Dr. Hoyer said that his office would probably use the facilities of the Philadelphia ME's office, which has refrigerator space for 250 bodies. He also noted that in a disaster, the cause of death is known and the goal is to identify the bodies.

Moving into the autopsy room, the smell of formaldehyde intensified. Two walls were lined with specimen jars containing tissues from the major organs of bodies autopsied, which are kept for seven years. Standing behind a steel autopsy table, Dr. Hoyer explained that the word autopsy means "to look inside and see for oneself." Unlike hospital autopsies, autopsies conducted by an ME examine the deceased's effects and the outside of the body as well as the inside.

The ME runs toxicology tests primarily to look for substances of abuse. The most common substance of abuse related to cause of death is alcohol. A finding of poison is rare. "Most of our bad guys don't want to wait. They prefer the Smith & Wesson solution," said Dr. Hoyer.

After the presentation and tour, attendees dined at the renowned South Jersey steakhouse, The Pub.

The program was a joint venture of AMWA-DVC's Pennsylvania and New Jersey Program Committees. Thanks to Pennsylvania Program Committee Chair, Christina Valente, New Jersey Program Committee Chair, Kira Belkin, and committee members Lori De Milto, Debbie Early, Janet Manfre, and Bernice Schacter.

Lori De Milto is a freelance marketing medical writer based in Sicklerville, N.J.

News from National

By *Debbie Early and Scott Metsger*

There were approximately 815 attendees at the AMWA Annual Conference this year, held from 29 September to 1 October. Approximately 250 (30%) were first-time attendees. The 3-day period was filled with:

- 84 workshops
- 33 open sessions
- 62 roundtables
- 9 poster sessions

The board of directors met the afternoon before the start of the conference and chapter delegates met after the welcome reception to discuss broader issues relating to chapter functions.

Meeting Discussion Highlights

- Dorit Shapiro received the Chapter Article Award for her article on computer security issues that was published in the *Delawriter*.

See News on 3.

News from 2

- Harrison's Online will be made available at no charge to all AMWA members shortly after the annual conference.
- Members can select from 6 listservs at the national level: chapters, pharmaceutical, freelance, editing-writing, educators, and public relations, advertising, and marketing.
- The DVC chapter hosts 2 listservs, one announcing job openings and one dedicated to freelance issues.
- Headquarters is considering ways to exchange information about insurance options between members, and is preparing a position statement on medical insurance as a member benefit. Obstacles to AMWA offering, recommending, or participating in any insurance program(s) include geographic issues, legal costs, headquarter staff time to answer an increased number of telephone calls, the advancing age of the membership, the small number of members that would constitute a group, liability issues, and tax implications (offering insurance is unrelated to AMWA's education

mission). The Canadian chapter now offers medical insurance to their members.

Education

A science curriculum is under development. The first courses intended to be offered at next year's annual conference are Biochemistry and Basics of Genetics; both will be offered as non-credit workshops.

Additional self-study courses are being developed. Punctuation for Clarity and Style will be launched at the annual conference next year. The next self-study course to be offered will be Sentence Structure and Patterns followed by Statistics for Medical Writers.

Member solicitations

Volunteers are wanted to proofread the national *AMWA Journal*. If you would like to volunteer, please write to Robert Hand at volunteer@amwa-dvc.com.

DVC members who prepare grant proposals are encouraged to contact the AMWA Director of Development, Kevin Flynn, with potential sponsors for a panel discussion on ethics to be held at next year's annual conference.

DVC Members Volunteer at Annual Conferences

Our thanks to the following members who contributed to the success of the annual conference in Pittsburgh this year by leading in the identified areas.

- Joan Affleck, Roundtable leader, Open sessions moderator
- Brian Bass, Poster presentations coordinator, Workshop leader, Roundtable leader
- Bob Bonk, Short sessions coordinator, Workshop leader
- Lori De Milto, Breakfast roundtable coordinator
- Maryalice Ditzler, Workshop leader
- Susanna Dodgson, Open sessions speaker
- Debbie Early, Workshop leader, Chapter delegate
- Anna Hagen, Open sessions speaker
- Larry Liberti, Workshop leader, Roundtable leader
- Scott Metsger, Chapter delegate
- Karen Overstreet, Open sessions panelist, Roundtable leader
- Barbara Rinehart, Roundtable leader
- Edie Schwager, Workshop leader, Roundtable leader
- Lynda Stear, Roundtable leader, Coffee and dessert klatch leader
- Joel Tau, Workshop leader
- Larry Tobias, Roundtable leader, Coffee and dessert klatch leader
- Mary Whitman, Workshop leader, Roundtable leader, Open sessions speaker
- Christina Valente, Roundtable leader
- Lili Fox Velez, Open sessions moderator

Delawriter

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XML for Medical Writers

By Karen Dutka

Carl F. Husa, Jr. shed some light on a somewhat intimidating subject when he presented a non-credit XML workshop at the Ninth Annual Princeton Conference. Husa is an academically trained biologist (with a masters in Electron Microscopy from Hofstra University). He is an accomplished technologist and systems integrator (Microsoft MCSE), an experienced technical writer particularly on healthcare topics, and a skilled analyst with experience in eliciting and documenting business and technical requirements. Over the past few years, he has studied XML, and its impact on single sourcing and on intelligently delivering narrative.

The purpose of the workshop was to explain what you can do with XML, not how you do it. XML stands for eXtensible Markup Language. After a show of hands, it appeared that most attendees did not know what XML was, but thought that they *should* know because they may have to use it in the future.

Why would a writer need to know XML?

Although Husa explained that XML has been “hijacked by programmers,” it can be used by people in other fields such as medical writers. Basically, XML is a publication format for content. Potentially, if not currently, medical writers may be involved in authoring XML documents and schema.

Writers deal with narrative, which has the following in common with data:

- It’s structured (we can treat narrative as a tree)
- It’s typed (has data)
- It’s constrained (e.g., style guides)

Husa displayed a slide that showed how XML supports a writer’s tasks (gathering, organizing, standardizing, validating, and publishing). Just like narrative, in XML, every document is a tree. As with the constraints of style guides, XML must follow a document standard to ensure correctness.

Some workshop attendees were familiar with HTML (HyperText Markup Language), which is used for presenting text and graphics on the World Wide Web. Both XML and HTML are derived from SGML (Standard Generalized Markup Language). Husa described SGML as an international standard, and a robust content and format tagging language. HTML is a simplified application of SGML concerned with document-appearance-using format or presentation tags, but not data structure. XML is a subset of SGML that does include structuring data, and unlike HTML, XML allows you to define your own tags and attributes; hence, “extensible” in the name. XML structures content, but does not provide meaning to the content itself. With XML tags, meaning is achieved through an externally agreed upon “vocabulary.”

Husa defined an XML document as:

- Text marked up with XML tags
- A sequence of characters, organized as entities, compliant with syntax
- Commonly, although not necessarily, a file

Husa provided several other definitions and a slew of recommendations. If you are at all familiar with HTML, you will recognize similarities — such as start tags “<>” and end tags “</>” that surround the data or content. An XML element comprises:

- a start tag <>
- data/content
- an end tag </>.

By abstract definition, an XML entity is an XML storage unit, which contains a single, well-formed document fragment. An XML element could be considered an entity.

Husa indicated that XML is “a language for defining languages for specific domains.” Since you can create your own tags in XML, you must have an external “vocabulary” that understands the meaning of the element tags. XML vocabulary refers to the set of tags that surround a narrative that you want a particular domain to use.

Although Husa indicated that there are over 100 rules in the XML recommendation, he highlighted the following:

- A root element is required (defining the start of the “tree” and having those tags surrounding all the other elements)
- End tags are required
- Element attributes must be quoted
- Overlapping of start and end tags is not allowed

An XML document that is “well-formed” means it follows the rules of XML syntax. Workshop attendees performed an exercise of marking up a document while adhering to XML rules for “well-formedness.” Afterwards, Husa delved into schema/DTD (the validation of an XML document), single sourcing (re-use of information), and content management (collecting, managing, and publishing information).

In summary, two essential things writers should know about XML were covered:

- eXtensible Markup Language – XML (what you write)
- Schema, schemata (what validates the document that you write)

Karen Dutka is a medical writer at Theradex located in Princeton Junction, N.J.

President's Award

Two AMWA-DVC members who have provided extraordinary leadership and service to the chapter received the 2005 President's Award at the June meeting: Debbie Early and Dorit Shapiro. "It is my great pleasure to present the 2005 President's Award to Debbie and Dorit, two members who have devoted much time and effort to improving our chapter over the last year, and done it all cheerfully," said AMWA-DVC President Lori De Milto.

Debbie Early served as secretary, membership chair, and June meeting chair. She also presented at our Getting Started in Medical Writing Workshop and at our Princeton Conference. As membership chair,

she organized a committee that is the model for our other committees.

When **Dorit Shapiro** volunteered to serve as our Web master, she gave us much needed control of our Web site. She re-vamped the Web site to make it more useful to members, and enabled us to post program announcements and other information promptly. She helped us expand our Web site to include new content for members on getting started, freelance, and more. Dorit has been chair of our freelance workshop—one of our largest events—for the past two years. This year she also took on coordination and registration for our new Getting Started in Medical Writing Workshop, another very large task.

Fourth Annual Freelance Workshop: January 14

Planning is underway for the Fourth Annual Freelance Workshop, which has been expanded to a full-day workshop this year. The workshop will be held on Saturday, January 14, 2006 at the Sheraton Park Ridge Hotel in King of Prussia, Pa.

As in previous years, we will be offering four presentations and the opportunity for a question and answer session with panelists in the morning. The specific topics are being finalized, but will address opportunities in freelance medical writing, an employer's perspective, writing style, and business issues for freelancers. A networking luncheon will follow the morning session.

The new afternoon session will comprise approximately 14 one-hour roundtables (7 per session). Topics will include the psychology of freelance and various types of freelance writing. We will have roundtables geared toward seasoned freelance writers as well as for aspiring/new freelance writers. Look for the workshop brochure on the AMWA-DVC Web site in mid-November.

Dorit Shapiro and Lori De Milto are co-chairing the workshop. They are looking for a few volunteers to help out with various tasks (contact Dorit or Lori at freelance@amwa-dvc.org to volunteer).

AMWA-DVC Supports AMWA Endowment Fund

The Delaware Valley Chapter (DVC) has supported the AMWA Endowment Fund since its inception in 2003. AMWA-DVC is very active, offering our members seven dinner meetings, a freelance workshop, and a regional conference each year, as well as a newsletter and a Web site. However, we must rely on the national organization for programs and services that aren't feasible for a chapter to provide.

Headquarters currently offers members an outstanding array of excellent educational programs and networking opportunities. Yet, like most organizations, there's always more that could be done to serve members—if sufficient funds were available. When the Endowment Fund reaches \$85,000, the board of directors (comprised, in the majority, of chapter delegates) will be able to vote to spend a certain portion of those funds on programs of its choice, particularly those suited to the educational goals of the chapter. Earnings from the fund can be used to initiate or support programs until they become self-sustaining, for example, by developing distance-learning workshops for the Web or new courses in the science curriculum. These activities will benefit AMWA members individually and help us build the field of medical writing.

AMWA-DVC is proud to support the AMWA Endowment Fund.

Survey Results

The results of the AMWA-DVC Member Benefit Survey, which was conducted in September 2005, will be available on the AMWA-DVC Web site. (www.amwa-dvc.org/about/survey_results092005.pdf)



AMWA-DVC
c/o Peggy Stansfield
131 Broadway Road
Cranbury, NJ 08512

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

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And our support to those listed below for their preparation of next year's annual conference in Albuquerque:

- Susanna Dodgson, Short session coordinator
- Debbie Early, Workshop leader, Chapter delegate
- Robert Hand, Coffee and dessert klatch coordinator (also a member of the national finance committee for 2005-2006)
- Lori De Milto, Open sessions coordinator

Upcoming Annual Meetings

- 2006: October 26-28, Albuquerque, N.M.
- 2007: October 11-13, Atlanta, Ga.
- 2008: October 23-25, Louisville, Ky.

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