

# DELAWRITER

The quarterly newsletter of AMWA-DVC

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## Fall 2011

AMWA-DVC Year-End President's Report:  
2010-2011

### Dear Members,

Welcome to another issue of the *Delawriter*. I'm so excited to be able to share this end-of-the-year recap with you via electronic format, complete with hyperlinks to make it easy to navigate through the content. Although we distributed 2 previous *Delawriter* issues via email as pdf attachments, in August 2011 we moved to the Constant Contact platform. We also have adopted this format for all of our program announcements. These professional-looking communications were the outcome of much hard work and time by our newly created e-communications committee, Lori De Milto and Amy Rovi. This initiative represents an annual cost saving of more than \$4000 for our chapter, since we no longer have printing and mailing costs.

### AMWA-DVC member receives national President's Award

Congratulations to Lori De Milto, Membership Chair, who received the 2011 President's Award at the AMWA Annual Conference in Jacksonville, Florida. The award is given by the national AMWA president to a member of AMWA for distinctive contributions to the association at the chapter or national level. The recipient must have been an AMWA member for 10 years and cannot have served on the Executive Committee. Members of our chapter have seen the results of Lori's talents and dedication for many years. Thank you, Lori, for your fine work with our organization.

### Membership

The AMWA-DVC continues to be a large, active chapter, with 777 members (as of August 1, 2011). Although this number represents a decline in membership since the beginning of 2010, when we averaged about 850 members, we continue to see new members join our organization each month. With enhanced programming and exclusive members-only benefits (still in development), we hope to see our numbers increase over the next year. Lori De Milto is our new Membership Chair, responsible for contacting new members and providing them with information about our chapter.

### Finances

AMWA-DVC is in great shape financially, and the Finance Committee, which includes Kate Casano, Amy Rovi, Robert

Hand, and Lisa Breck, monitors our finances monthly. Additionally, AMWA-DVC contracts with Heather Thompson Meier, CPA, who handles our tax preparation and other financial needs. As of June 30, 2011, our chapter had assets of \$49,731.12. Revenue and expenditures were well within budget. Congratulations go to Kate Casano, who was elected Treasurer at our June business meeting. Kate will serve a 2-year term, through June 2013.

### **Programs and events**

More than 325 people attended DVC programs in 2010-2011. Many thanks go to Julie Munden, Pennsylvania Program Chair, and Kira Belkin, New Jersey Program Chair, for planning these events. Both of these volunteers resigned their positions, creating an opportunity for Judy Keen and Joanne Rosenberg to take over program responsibilities in Pennsylvania and New Jersey, respectively. In an effort to create some redundancy among our leadership, we also have identified volunteers to serve as assistants who will be able to take over the function of the committee in the event the chair becomes unavailable. Assisting Judy are Sarah Thornburg and Beth Pulaski. Kavita Gumbhir-Shah assists Joanne on the New Jersey side.

Our special program events, which include the annual Freelance Workshop and the Princeton Conference, continue to be popular programs. Jen Maybin and Julie Munden had their hands full organizing the Ninth Annual Freelance Workshop on April 2, 2011, attended by 97 people. This was the largest turnout yet for this event. The Tenth Annual Freelance Workshop is scheduled for April 14, 2012, in King of Prussia, PA. Please contact Jen Maybin if you can assist in any way.

Brian Bass put together a high-quality program for the Princeton Conference on May 14, 2011. In case you're not familiar with this event, the Princeton Conference comprises credit workshops and noncredit programs, and enables attendees to earn credit toward AMWA certificates. Attended by 53 people, the Princeton Conference netted more than \$1,800 for our chapter. Next year's conference will be held on May 12, 2012.

We kicked off the 2011-2012 program year with a dinner meeting on September 21, 2011, entitled Identifying and Responding to Conflicts of Interest. Nearly 40 attendees had their questions answered by a panel of 3 experts. Thanks to Linda Felcone and her team for planning the content and securing our speakers.

### **Web site**

Janet Manfre keeps our Web site up to date by serving as our Webmaster. We are in the process of exploring the creation of a members-only area of the site to provide added value to our members. Look for more information about this initiative over the next few months.

### **New faces**

2010-2011 was characterized by a number of resignations, as long-time volunteers and committee chairs moved out of their positions. In addition to those I already mentioned, Alan Struthers returned as Newsletter Editor and Ana Maria Rodriguez-Rojas became our ListServe Coordinator. (Kate Casano had previously held that role for many years. Thanks, Kate.) Ana Maria also agreed to serve in a new volunteer position created this year, LinkedIn Moderator. In that role, she responds to requests to join the AMWA-DVC LinkedIn group and monitors discussions on the site.

We always have room for more new faces, in case you're interested in volunteering. If you'd like to get involved, even in a small way, please contact Linda Felcone, our Volunteer Coordinator. The success of our chapter depends on the many hard-working volunteers who handle tasks behind the scenes. We'd love for you to get involved.

Respectfully submitted,

Cyndy Kryder  
President

## September Meeting Recap

### Identifying and Responding to Ethical Dilemmas

By Yvonne Yarker

Our profession's ethics seem to be constantly under scrutiny. Medical communication activities funded by pharmaceutical, biotech, and device industries are governed by an increasing number of guidelines and regulations. What is required to comply with current guidances? Some ethical dilemmas were discussed at a recent dinner meeting of the AMWA-DVC held on September 21, 2011, in Langhorne, PA. The presenters were:

- Art Gertel, VP, Strategic Regulatory Consulting, Medical Writing, and QA at Beardsworth Consulting Group, Inc.
- Ross Baker, Director, CNS Global Medical Affairs, Otsuka Pharmaceutical Group, and
- Charmaine J. Cummings, PhD, RN, Director, Oncology Education and Alliances at Rockpointe Corporation, and President, CJ Cummings Consulting, LLC.

#### How does society view ethics in medical research?

Art Gertel presented his thoughts on how society views ethics in relation to medical research and medical communications. Ethics is a set of moral principles to protect the vulnerable and guard against corruption. Some of the most common principles relevant to medical research include the World Medical Association (WMA) Declaration of Helsinki (<http://www.wma.net/en/30publications/10policies/b3/>) and the International Conference on Harmonisation (ICH) E6 Good Clinical Practice guidelines (<http://www.ich.org/products/guidelines/efficacy/article/efficacy-guidelines.html>) For medical writers, some key guidelines and systems include the "Uniform Requirements for Manuscripts Submitted to Biomedical Journals" from the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (<http://www.icmje.org>), the peer review process used by reputable medical journals, and the drive towards increasing transparency through initiatives such as the ICMJE's standardized conflict of interest form.

#### Ethical standards do exist - are they being used?

Dr Gertel emphasized the need for guidelines and principles when he reviewed negative reports and lay press articles relating to the publication of industry-sponsored research. He demonstrated how industry, journal editors, and medical writers have responded by setting industry standards and updating guidelines, such as the "Good publication practice for communicating company sponsored medical research: the GPP2 guidelines" (Graf et al, BMJ 2009; <http://www.gpp-guidelines.org/>), and "What should be done to tackle ghostwriting in the medical literature?" (Gotzche et al, PLoS Medicine 2009).

Unfortunately, not everyone adheres to these guidances and standards. For example, many journals adhere to ICMJE guidelines; yet some alter these guidelines, which can lead to confusion for those who are trying to act in an ethical manner. How can we build on the progress already made? How can we advocate for ethical standards? Are formal education efforts needed, and if so, how would these be accomplished? Is a single comprehensive set of global ethical standards required, or is this just too difficult to accomplish?

### Industry perspective on ethics

Ross Baker had two ethical principles that he believed were important to industry: (1) timely, accurate, and clear communication of results, and (2) helping patients and healthcare providers understand the risks and benefits of a treatment. The goal is to put patients first. One challenge is that industry continues to be scrutinized for past transgressions, rather than for current standards. He presented some interesting conundrums in how clinical trial data are reported. In the US, some clinical trial results must be posted on [www.clinicaltrials.gov](http://www.clinicaltrials.gov); yet often the data have already been presented at scientific congresses. Which of these is the most ethical way to present data? Regardless of the format or vehicle, Dr Baker believes that data presentations should guide the effective treatment of patients.

### How is an author defined?

One ethical dilemma that Dr Baker addressed was authorship. How and when should authorship be determined? Dr Baker supported the view that authorship should be decided in advance, before writing had commenced. He also proposed that all authors must make a substantial intellectual contribution to the manuscript, as recommended by the ICMJE (<http://www.icmje.org>, section IIA). He also reminded us that people other than the investigators may make significant contributions to a clinical trial and the subsequent data analysis, so may have a legitimate claim to authorship.

### AMWA and ethics

Dr Cummings discussed AMWA's approach to ethics in medical writing. The AMWA Code of Ethics (<http://www.amwa.org/default.asp?id=114>) was first developed in 1973 and most recently updated in 2008. All AMWA members agree to comply with the Code of Ethics. There are two workshops ("Essential Ethics for Medical Communicators" and "Ethical Standards in Medical Publication") that specifically address professional ethics. For members who have ethical dilemmas, the AMWA Code of Ethics can help guide best practices. In the future, AMWA plans to develop a simple ethics decision-making model to help members handle difficult ethical issues.

*Yvonne Yarker, PhD, CMPPTM is the owner of Medicite, LLC, based in Yardley, PA. She is a medical communications specialist, an author of the GPP2 guidelines, and currently Chair of the ISMPP Ethics Committee.*

## Ninth Annual Freelance Workshop

AMWA-DVC's Ninth Annual Freelance Workshop was held on April 2, 2011, in King of Prussia, PA. Several of the presentations were discussed in the last issue of the *Delawriter*. The following two articles report some additional highlights of the Workshop.

## Freelance Workshop

### Bad Behaviors

By Jannette Morrow

Freelance medical writer Cynthia Kryder, MS, presented "Bad Behaviors: How Freelancers Sabotage Their Business," discussing ten behaviors that freelancers should avoid:

1. **Not meeting deadlines.** Deliver on time. If you can't, communicate with your client and work together for a reasonable solution.
2. **Invoicing for more than the agreed-upon price.** Absorb the cost if your estimated rate was too low. If the client expands the scope of the project, prepare another estimate.
3. **Charging too little.** Ms Kryder advised freelancers to check the latest AMWA salary survey for a reasonable rate. Charge by the project, not by the hour.
4. **Avoiding client calls and e-mails.** Be available when clients need answers.
5. **Missing the target audience or message.** Know what purpose your piece will serve. If you're not told, ask.
6. **Leaving grammatical or spelling errors.** Clients choose writers who provide clean copy.
7. **Making excuses for inaccurate or inferior work.** "Admit your mistake," Ms Kryder said. Make sure your client gives you everything you need to complete the project.
8. **Being inflexible.** Sometimes, you'll have to bend over backwards, especially for the good of a client.
9. **Using poor social media judgment.** Be careful what you put on Facebook or other social media pages.
10. **Complaining about making revisions.** Don't take revision requests personally. Include them in your estimate.

Ms Kryder concluded by saying that everything you do should provide value to both your client and yourself.

*Jannette Morrow, MD, is a freelance medical writer in Wilmington, Delaware.*

## Freelance Workshop

### The 10 Essential Skills

By Ilsa Gomez-Curet

Debra Gordon, MS, identified the 10 essential skills that a successful freelance medical writer must have in today's job market:

1. **Self-knowledge.** Writers must know why they want to be independent, and whether they will enjoy working on their own. Ms Gordon suggested writing a mission statement and revising it every couple of years.
2. **Be financially savvy.** It is important to keep track of income and expenses, plan for retirement, and hire help when needed. In addition, Ms Gordon recommended hiring a certified public accountant (CPA) and a lawyer. A CPA can help you choose the correct structure for your

- business and can file the necessary paperwork for you; a lawyer can help you with clients who have not paid you for the services provided.
3. **Be marketing savvy.** Successful writers must be good at "telling people about what they do," Ms Gordon said. She suggested creating a professional Web site and becoming an active member at associations such as AMWA.
  4. **Be social-marketing savvy.** Using social media tools such as LinkedIn and Twitter and creating a professional blog, e-newsletter, or website are essential marketing tools for freelance writers.
  5. **Manage your time.** Knowing when you are the most productive and when you have the least amount of interruptions will help you plan your work. Also, tracking the time spent on different project tasks will help the writer set appropriate project fees.
  6. **Be technology savvy.** Ms Gordon recommended having a laptop, smart phone, scanner, and printer.
  7. **Build a support network.** Freelancers should find a virtual, professional network that works for them, and they should actively participate in groups and online discussions as a way to increase their visibility and showcase their skills.
  8. **Use your intuition.** Ms Gordon believes that writers should be willing to walk away from a project if their gut tells them to.
  9. **Be flexible.** Freelance medical writers should understand that clients hire them when they are in crisis. Freelance writers may need to work nights and weekends.
  10. **Have a sense of humor.** Freelance writers need to understand that not all clients will hire them again, learn how to laugh at themselves, and "brush off some of the things that clients do," Ms Gordon said.

*Ilsa Gomez-Curet, PhD, is a freelance biomedical consultant and medical writer. She has over 10 years of experience in biomedical research and writing and editing scientific and technical documents for the academic, hospital, and industry settings.*

## Delawriter

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