

THE PACEMAKER

NEWSLETTER OF THE NORTHERN CALIFORNIA CHAPTER OF AMWA

President's Message

Catherine Magill, PhD



Communication. Even though, or perhaps because, we as Medical Writers are "professional communicators", it is a valuable exercise to frequently reflect on one's own communication style for both the written and the spoken word.

The three major areas that can benefit from eternal vigilance seem to me to be as follows:

- * Modify the amount of communication
- * Improve the clarity of communication
- * Increase the quality of the communication

The first of these, to modify the amount of communication is one that I try to pay attention to often. I am a relatively shy and quiet person and my natural proclivity is to listen and not to talk.

Perhaps it is an internalization of Mark Twain's famous remark that "it is better to keep your mouth shut and appear stupid than to open it and remove all doubt", or remnants of my mother's "if you don't have anything nice to say then don't say anything at all" but I don't talk a whole lot.

I occasionally get into trouble because of this. Methods that I have used to coach myself to be more communicative include requiring myself to say one thing every time I'm participating in an activity (ask a question after every seminar, for example), and to pay attention to my internal responses to situations and make an effort to verbalize that response (constructively).

I try to implement what I learned in graduate school about guidelines for creating clear lectures: tell the audience what you're going to tell

In This Issue

February, 2008

President's Message	1	Web 3.0	6
Pacific Coast Conference	3	Book Review	7
Bocce Ball Social	3	Word Tricks	10
Online Communications	4	The Chapter Delegate	12
Jobs	5	New Members	14
Submissions, Please	5	Chapter Board	14

them, then tell them, then tell them what you told them. Repetition never hurts.

Interestingly, my writing style is similar to my verbal style. I have to pay attention to fleshing out my thoughts in such a way that the reader does not have to make assumptions about the details.

The second, to improve the clarity of communication, is something that we have to pay attention to all the time.

If I tell myself to step back and think about what it is that I want to communicate, I have a much better chance of having those around me to understand what I am trying to say. The same goes for writing. Taking a step back and thinking through the message, then outlining the message with those thoughts in mind, makes for a much clearer and more articulate article. Paying attention to tense and minimizing modifying phrases helps to clarify writing immensely.

I find that it helps to break complicated concepts down into bite-sized pieces when writing. I often worry that this process can lead to over-simplification, but it really helps the reader to absorb the material more readily. I am reminded of this every time I read something that requires me to re-read it to understand, which happens not infrequently. We are not immune to writing in an overly abstruse manner.

The last point, increasing the quality of the communication, can be subtle but is very important. Ensure that your message is of sufficient importance, that your audience is paying attention, and that you don't drive them to tune out by talking too much. Just because you are talking doesn't mean that you are communicating. It is the responsibility of the communicator to make sure that the communicatee is paying attention.

This doesn't have a direct translation to the written word, because one can assume that in our field, the topic is of sufficient importance and the reader is paying attention. But breaking the message down into absorbable pieces and not cluttering them up in the writing process is the key to high quality writing.

Frequent attention to these aspects of our communications can only serve to improve our ability to practice our trade and make life better in general. It makes sense to make a concerted effort to strive to incorporate them into our daily routine.

Last chance to register for the Pacific Coast Conference at Asilomar!

Don't miss your chance to attend one of the most memorable events AMWA has to offer, with its variety of workshops and open sessions, unique location, and the opportunity for in-depth networking. It is also the only event in California where you can take workshops for credit in AMWA's certificate programs, which offer extensive continuing education for professional communicators in the medical and allied scientific fields.

Conference registration closes February 25. There are still a few slots left in the Advanced workshop, Reporting Randomized Trials in Scientific Journals (ADV)[#719]. Course homework is due Feb. 29, so if you want to take it, be sure to register early enough to get the homework and complete it on time. The homework for core workshops is not due until March 14, but they often sell out, so sign up soon to ensure a slot.

For those who aren't taking a credit workshop (and even those who are), the conference also offers--at no extra charge--a keynote presentation on wilderness medicine and 8 other open sessions to teach you new skills, pique your interest, or scratch your intellectual itches. Visit www.amwancal.org/pcc to see the list of session titles and speakers; the brochure available for download on the site has more complete descriptions of each event.

Perhaps the best parts of the conference, though, are the less formal ones. Communal meals, plenty of socials, the silliness of the skit, the chance to stomp on the beach in search of bioluminescence--all become unforgettable experiences that can build networks, create friendships, and (not infrequently) lead to future work.

Bocce Ball Social

Catherine Magill

A small group of NorCal AMWA members met on Saturday, January 26th for lunch and bocce ball at Campo di Bocce in Livermore and had a terrific time. Campo di Bocce is in a fairly rural part of Livermore and we had the good luck of having great weather that day (unexpectedly). The drive over from the Peninsula was absolutely beautiful.

We started with antipasto and a wonderful bruschetta, which was followed by a traditional Caesar salad. The main courses were Cappelini Pomodoro, with a light and almost greaseless "sauce" of tomatoes, garlic and basil, Fettucini Alfredo, which was so good that even though I could feel my arteries clogging up, I served myself seconds and then thirds, and Chicken Picatta, which smelled wonderfully lemony, but as a vegetarian

of which I did not partake - judging from the number of times the plate went around the table, it must have been delicious as well!

After the meal, it was time to adjourn to the indoor bocce court. Bocce involves the rolling of balls (bocce) down a long court with the goal of getting as close as possible to a small metallic ball (the pallino). The strategy involves both careful aim and precision throwing as well as knowing when and how to knock your opponent's balls away from the pallino.

First, we were given a short lesson on how to play bocce and then were cut loose. You can learn the game in ten minutes but it takes a lifetime to master.

The good news is that you can have a great time without much mastery at all. We played for about an hour and a half, during which time the green team slaughtered the red team, but no one really cared because a delicious assortment of Italian desserts and coffee had been served up next to the court. We all partook readily.

Too soon, the time ran out and we went our own merry ways, but during the meal and the game we all met new people and talked with each of them for a while. The result is several new people who I can contact when I am looking for work or have a vexing writing problem. A really good time was had by all - and boy did I not need dinner that night!

Optimizing Online Communications Tools for Biotech

Business Wire and Zoomedia present a panel discussion featuring Jamie O'Donnell Co-Founder of SEO-PR and Joel Tesch Regional Sales Manager for Business Wire.

Topics include Google Universal and blended searches, the implications for life sciences corporate communications and incorporating the strongest search engine optimization tools into preparing press releases for the life sciences industry.

Join us on Tuesday March 4, 2007 from 5:00 pm to 7:00 pm at Monogram Biosciences Inc., 345 Oyster Point Blvd, South San Francisco, CA. This event is free for BayBio members and \$20 for non-members. Please RSVP to Maya Hovey (maya@baybio.org).

Jobs! Jobs!

California HealthCare Foundation Communications Officer, Better Chronic Disease Healthcare

The California HealthCare Foundation (CHCF), an independent philanthropy committed to improving the way health care is delivered and financed in California, is looking for a communications officer.

The position is focused on improving healthcare for Californians with chronic disease. The Communications Officer will report to the Director of Publishing and Communications and will work directly with staff for the program area as well as have some Foundation-wide communications responsibilities. Primary responsibilities include: enhancing program work through greater efficiency and creativity; providing publications support; develop strategies and programs to reach and engage target audiences; and develop a strong media relations program.

Requirements include: a minimum of seven years experience in a communications-related field with a demonstrated knowledge of health, health policy and/or medicine/science subjects. Experience in communications strategy development and project and client management is required, contacts with key media and government policymakers is strongly preferred.

Contact jobs@chcf.org and refer to Job CO-CHF.

Call For Submissions: Prose and Poetry

A CONVERSATION BETWEEN PATIENTS AND THEIR CAREGIVERS

An anthology of creative writing pairing the work of patients with the work of doctors and nurses.

The first anthology of its kind....

Writing from patients will be juxtaposed with the writing of physicians and nurses.

Writing will be coupled by topic.

No topic will be limited or censored.

Editors: Dagan Coppock, MD, coeditor of the poetry anthology published by BOA, Body Language; Paula Zimlicki, editor of Poetic Medicine: A Journal of Healing

Submission Criteria:

Submit up to 5 pieces. Poems should be no more than one page. Prose should be no more than two pages, single spaced, 12-point font. E-mail

submissions by May 1, 2008. Please send submissions as Word document attachments to: dcoppock@bidmc.harvard.edu or paula@paulazimlicki.com. Include the following in the text message: your name, address, telephone, e-mail address, and brief bio.

Participants will be informed by September 30, 2008 if their work has been selected.

Web 3.0 for Medical Writers

Genevive Bjorn

One way to get more mileage out of your medical writing is to better understand and share what you have. The next generation of internet, currently buzzing around the Bay Area and other tech strongholds, is Web 3.0. Visionaries like Nova Spivack at Twine.com think the future of the internet will be an intelligent web, a smart network that learns and understands what we do and will be able to connect the disparate threads of our digital lives. For medical writers, this may mean the social network timewasters of Web 2.0 like MySpace and Facebook could give way to meaningful connection timesavers like Freebase, Twine and Spock.

Certainly not all Web 2.0 applications are frivolous. The professional networking site LinkedIn.com is among the most useful for people wanting to expand their work sphere or contact sources for articles. A newer site, NotchUp.com, promises to pay already-employed professionals to interview for jobs they aren't looking for. The idea is that people who are good at what they do and are happy at their job are the most coveted employees. Web 2.0 has come along way from eBay and Amazon.

Web 3.0 is all about determining the meaning of text and then creating connections for users wherever they may be. For example, instead of typing an email to a colleague and looking up all the links and attachments, web 3.0 applications will know what the subject is and may suggest websites, books, documents, photos, videos and other references online or saved to the hard drive that may be relevant to the subject. It might be like having a really smart personal assistant that

never sleeps or takes vacation.

The intelligence of Web 3.0, or the “semantic web” as Spivack calls it, is based on a new kind of open web architecture that learns and processes language naturally, creating a more immersive and rich web experience—plenty of Google-killing potential. Web 1.0 was all about creating the basic platform of the back end. Web 2.0 has been about improving the front end user interface and connecting people to each other. Web 3.0 will also be about the back end, but this time with a focus on indexing and connecting the vast amounts of essential data that search engines like Google catalog. One example of Web 3.0 in action is natural language search where full questions can be answered, such as “Which drugs treat chronic disease?” The web will know that meglitinides are drugs and that diabetes is a chronic disease.

With this kind of meaningful connectivity, certain proprietary industries like pharmaceuticals, entertainment and energy could fear a negative impact to profits and resist—just like the music industry did with digital formats and online stores, a losing battle they are still fighting. Individual medical writers might feel overwhelmed by even more changes in web technology. We already have enough on our desks. But being able to sift through gigabytes of data more efficiently and put it to better use in day-to-day work is a major prize. As with every major cultural shift, there are winners and losers. Finding a way to embrace the emerging trends and make it work is key. Whatever the future of the web, it’s not going away and its evolution has only just begun.

Genevive Bjorn is a freelance writer based on Maui, Hawaii. To learn more about her, visit her website at www.GeneviveBjorn.com or blog at <http://gbjorn.wordpress.com>

The Complete Guide to Medical Writing

Mark C. Stuart, editor. London, UK: Pharmaceutical Press. 2007. 491p. \$39.95. ISBN: 978-0-85369-667-4

Reviewed by Elizabeth H. Wood, MA, MSLS, AHIP, Portland, OR: woode@easystreet.com

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This multiauthored work is from the Pharmaceutical Press (PhP), the publishing arm of the “Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain founded in 1841. The Society is the regulatory and professional body for pharmacists in England, Scotland and Wales. Its primary objective is to lead, regulate and develop the pharmacy profession” [1]. The book is indeed complete and speaks to novice writers or students who may be new to the health professions, as well as knowledgeable clinicians and researchers who need help compiling examination questions, writing press releases, or adding publications to their resumes.

The editor is clinical editor for BMJ Clinical Evidence, and the foreword is written by Julia Forjanic Klapproth, vice president of the European Medical Writers Association. Most of the more than twenty authors work in Britain, three are from Malta, one is Australian, and, finally, there is the Plain English Campaign. Nearly all are trained in some aspect of pharmaceuticals, though they cover a wide range of topics. One is a qualified librarian. The authority of the PhP and the wide range of expertise and experience among the authors give the reader confidence.

The Complete Guide does not just discuss how to write. It describes every aspect of the medical literature and publishing world. The chapters are collected into six sections that discuss medical writing essentials, reviews and reports, medical journalism and mass media, medical writing in education, medical writing for medical professionals, and medical publishing. It appeals to medical novices who are called on to write but need a better understanding of medicine itself, as well as seasoned clinicians, academics, and researchers who need a better, deeper understanding of the types of writing.

The book is designed to be used as a textbook. Chapters provide summaries, bulleted lists of major points, questions and answers, and other material such as “Further Reading,” “Useful Resources,” “Glossary,” and “Useful Websites.” “Writing” is used loosely to include live presentations, radio programs, slide shows, advertising and posters, and online research.

Much of the advice is very practical (how to print and bind a thesis), and some is amusing (asking grandma to write down

her chocolate cake recipe), but the book is packed with facts and examples. Some of the “typical” document examples are British, but this does not detract from its usefulness.

Besides a thorough back-of-the-book index, the book has useful appendixes of “Common Medical Abbreviations,” “Measurements,” “Normal Values for Common Laboratory Tests,” “Proof Correctional Marks,” and “A to Z of Medical Terms in Plain English.” This last contains many British spellings, but most readers should not find this a problem, especially because British journals and websites are widely read and used, and the few Greek diphthongs (oedema, gynaecology) are easily grasped.

The British origin of the publication, however, may be its only drawback. This will depend on how much the reader needs certain parts of the book. Discussion of ethics, copyright, style, appropriateness of audience, organization of content, various forums for one’s efforts—all of these are universal and provide much interesting and useful background. However, if one is preparing a news item for release to the press, the sources on page 423 are of little use outside the United Kingdom. This may be minor compared to the otherwise excellent “Checklist for Writing Press Releases” and the thorough discussion of “Principles of Good Advertising” that begin chapter 12.

This reviewer expected considerable discussion of the professional literature, writing of theses, academic material, and similar and indeed was not disappointed. Highlights from the book, which rather surprised this reviewer in their novelty, included “Differences in Writing for Magazines and Newspapers” and “Important Points to Consider when Writing for the Lay Press” (pp. 156-) and “The Top 10 Web Design Mistakes of 2005” and “Writing Style for Websites” (pp. 416-).

Anyone involved in the health professions, whether readers or writers, will appreciate and enjoy this book. While not as much fun as *Eats, Shoots and Leaves* [2], it is easier to navigate than the excellent reference, *The Chicago Manual of Style* [3], and is a joy to read by any lover of language and its many applications.

REFERENCES

1. Pharmaceutical Press [web document]. The Press. [3 Jul 2007]. <<http://www.pharmpress.com>>.
2. Truss L. *Eats, shoots and leaves*. Penguin Group, 2006.
3. University of Chicago Press Staff, ed. *The Chicago manual of style*. 15th ed. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2003.

When Styles Don’t Stick

Laura Singer, ELS

One of the most frustrating situations I’ve encountered with Word is when I try to apply a style but it doesn’t “stick.” One common approach to dealing with this situation is to reapply the style, hoping that the second (or third or fourth) time you do so, Word will start behaving the way it’s supposed to.

As you probably know from personal experience, that approach doesn’t work. Here are two ways that do:

Clear the Mind

If a style doesn’t stick after you’ve made extensive changes, try this in Word 2002 and later:

1. Highlight the problematic text (the way you normally do when applying any style).
2. Go to the Task Pane (use the Formatting Palette if you’re working on a Mac).
3. Scroll to the top of the Style list.
4. Select Clear Formatting, the topmost option on the Style list. The highlighted text changes to the Normal style.
5. Highlight the text and apply the desired style.

This method works because Word keeps track of every change you make until you invoke the Save As command.

If you’ve made extensive changes, Word gets overloaded, throws up its little hands and says “Enough already! I’m so confused; what do you want me to do?” (Forgive the anthropomorphism.)

When you use Clear Formatting, you’re essentially telling Word, “Forget all the style changes I told you to make. Clear your mind and let’s start fresh.”

Hidden in the Pilcrow

If you've worked with bulleted or numbered lists and changed their formatting, you might have encountered a situation in which the text changed to the new formatting while the bullet or number kept the old formatting. For example:

- a. This line is highlighted in green.
- b. When I removed the green highlight, the letter b retained the highlight.
- c. I removed the highlight from the line and from the letter c.

Here's the secret: Formatting for the automatically generated characters (i.e., the numbers and bullets) is in the paragraph marker (¶). What caused the difference in formatting between items b and c in the example above is that when I highlighted item b, I highlighted the text up to and including the period, but not the paragraph marker; when I highlighted item c, I highlighted both the text and the paragraph marker.

Fake text

If you need to generate fake text to test a layout or determine how many characters will fit in a text box, you can quickly generate multiple paragraphs by typing `=rand()` and then hitting Return. When you do so, those seven characters are replaced with this:

The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog. The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog. The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog. The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog. The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog.

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The Role of the Chapter Delegate

Naomi Ruff, updated by Catherine Magjill

We (Naomi and Catherine) have each had the privilege of serving as the Northern California Chapter Delegate to the National AMWA Board of Director's meeting .

Did you find yourself asking, "Serving as the whaty what?" You're not alone.

To explain what the chapter delegate does, I first have to describe the administrative structure of AMWA. Knowing how things work, you can help to ensure that AMWA meets your needs in the future.

Members join AMWA through the National organization and are automatically placed into chapters based on their geographic location. Each chapter has a Chapter Board that organizes local meetings, produces newsletters such as this one, and may provide other services such as distributing job ads or holding local conferences. Each Chapter Board must have a President, Vice President (President-elect), Secretary, and Treasurer. Our chapter has added a Membership Liaison, Programs Chair, and Newsletter Editor as chapter officers. All of these positions are held by volunteers, who are compensated only in fame, glory, a line in their resume, and the sense of having helped fellow medical writers.

AMWA National has a similar panel of officers, including President, President-elect, Secretary, Treasurer, and Immediate Past President. The Executive Committee (EC), is made up of the "Administrator" of each department, such as Budget and Finance, Annual Conference, Education, and so on (see www.amwa.org for more information on the departments), as well as members-at-large. The body that sets overall policy for AMWA is the Board of Directors (BOD), which includes the officers, EC, and chapter delegates. As at the chapter level, the National officers and administrators are all volunteers. AMWA also has a small paid staff at headquarters in Maryland.

In some chapters, Chapter Delegate is a distinct position. In ours, the President has "first dibs" on serving.

According to our Chapter By-Laws, one of the President's

duties is: To serve as National Delegate or to appoint a Board member as National Delegate. If no Board members are available to serve, the President appoints a chapter member as National Delegate, as authorized by the Board of Directors. The National Delegate represents the Chapter and participates in the business of the National Board of Directors.

Because the delegate represents the chapter, it is important that this position be filled by someone who has been active in the chapter and is familiar with recent programs, activities, and policies.

The chapter delegate serves as the link between the chapter and the national organization. Twice a year, in the spring and in the fall, the entire BOD meets to report progress on new Initiatives and to discuss programs and AMWA policy. The BOD votes on National officer nominations and awards, and hears reports by each Administrator. Many changes to AMWA policy require a vote by the BOD, however, the BOD works as much as possible by consensus. Ideas are often tabled or refined until they achieve a form that everyone can agree on.

Being a chapter delegate has been a wonderful experience for both of us. We've gained a new understanding of how AMWA works and have had the chance to meet other writers from all over the country (and sometimes from beyond). We've had the opportunity to tell others about what our chapter offers (for example, our local jobs distribution list) and to solicit ideas on how to better serve our members. We've had the opportunity to voice our opinions and concerns as well as those of chapter members regarding the Implementation of AMWA programs, and to contribute ideas on how to refine new programs or improve services for members.

Catherine will serve as chapter delegate once more (in early April) during her current year as chapter President, then hand off the baton in the fall of 2008. In preparation for this meeting she asks all chapter members to share any issues, suggestions, or concerns that you would like aired, addressed, or resolved at the meeting. Remember, both the local and national boards are made up of medical writers just like you!

We want your input on how to make the organization one that serves all of its members in the best way possible.

Welcome to our newest members

Rick Barnum, Tammy Egger, Marilyn Holm, Stephanie C Kucera, Diane Mark, Ingrid Paulson, Patricia Phaneuf, William Rasmussen, M Evelyn Rose, Jodie K Rothschild, Aldebra L Schroll.

Please make them feel welcome!

**Like What You See?-
Want to Make it Better?-**

The Pacemaker, our chapter newsletter, needs your help!

Please send your suggestions and submissions to editor Fred Gebhart, pacemaker@amwancal.org. Our newsletter depends on your help, your input and your great ideas for the future.

2008 Northern California Board of Directors

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