



# PACEMAKER

**Summer 2019**

## Highlights

- Letter From the President
- 2018-2019 Board of Directors
- Book Nook
- Chapter Member Profile
- Welcome New Members

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## Letter From Our Chapter President

Dear American Medical Writers Association (AMWA) Northern California Chapter (NorCal) Members:

First, happy summer to you all!

Second, below are the accomplishments of AMWA NorCal to date for 2019 and recognition of those who have helped:

- On January 26, 2019, AMWA NorCal held its Annual Chapter Membership Meeting, and Josh Schechtel, a physician from the San Mateo County Health Department, gave the presentation “Opportunities for Medical Writers in Continuing Medical Education” at the Delancey Street Restaurant in San Francisco. Maggie Norris, AMWA NorCal Program Committee Chair, and committee members Andrea Johnson (AMWA NorCal Vice President) and Leslie Kowitz helped to make the event happen. Barbara Arnoldussen, AMWA NorCal Secretary, took the minutes for the meeting part of the event. In total, 19 AMWA NorCal and/or National members supported the event with their attendance.
- On March 24, 2019, Maggie presented “EndNote for Medical Writers: A Word Witch Seminar for Aspiring and Intermediate Users” at Michael’s at Shoreline restaurant in Mountain View. Leslie and Andrea also helped to make the event happen, and 13 AMWA NorCal members supported the event with their attendance.
- Nancy Katz, AMWA NorCal Immediate Past President, has spearheaded the rewriting of AMWA NorCal’s bylaws according to the AMWA National template. Barbara and I have also been involved in discussions about the bylaws. Nancy has sent a draft of the bylaws to AMWA NorCal’s legal counsel for review. More information about the bylaws will be provided after the legal counsel review and a review by AMWA NorCal’s Board of Directors (BOD).
- Suzanne Canada, AMWA NorCal Membership Committee Chair, continues to track membership and send welcome letters to new members. You can find a list of new members in this newsletter.
- Caren Rickhoff, former AMWA NorCal Jobs List Administrator, has sent “AMWA NorCal: Job Opportunity” emails to AMWA NorCal members; Nisha Nair has assumed this responsibility.
- Snehal Mohile, AMWA NorCal Communications Committee Chair, with assistance from the webmaster, continues to keep the AMWA NorCal website updated.

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Committee members Caren and Nisha send emails concerning events and other information to AMWA NorCal members.

- Mimi Wessling and Nisha, AMWA NorCal Newsletter Editors, have published this edition of *Pacemaker*.
- Rose Tomey, AMWA NorCal Treasurer, continues to manage AMWA NorCal's finances and has provided financial status information for a report sent to AMWA National.
- Nancy continues to serve as the Chapter Advisory Council (CAC) Representative (more information below).

Many thanks to everyone for the help!

Third, upcoming events include:

- A possible presentation, either by teleconference or in person, about an aspect of pharmacology, tentatively during 2019.
- The annual AMWA Medical Writing & Communication Conference, in San Diego, November 6 through November 9, 2019. (Registration is open, and the link is <https://www.amwa.org/general/custom.asp?page=Conference>.)
- Nancy's "Electronic Common Technical Document" workshop at the conference.
- The AMWA NorCal dinner at the conference.
- A social event during Q4 2019.
- An in-person Annual Chapter Membership Meeting during Q1 2020 possibly accompanied by short (5- to 10-minute) presentations about conference experiences and information learned.

Fourth, volunteers, including the following, are needed:

- Additional Program Committee members to help with tasks involved in making an event happen, such as investigating a possible venue by telephone (using a checklist to be provided by the Programs Committee).
- AMWA NorCal Vice President candidates. An election will be held around October 2019, and the new Vice President will assume office in January 2020. For more information, please email me (address below).
- CAC Representative. The CAC, an AMWA National advisory group, maintains the connection between Chapter leaders and AMWA National's BOD (National BOD). The CAC provides input to the National BOD about:

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- The strategic direction of the National BOD regarding the Chapters.
- Issues that affect Chapters and AMWA National.

The CAC Representative's duties include:

- Attending three approximately one-hour virtual meetings per year.
- Attending one approximately two-hour meeting in person at the conference (encouraged but not mandatory; AMWA National is considering allowing participation by Skype).
- Actively participating in CAC discussions in meetings and by acknowledging and/or responding to CAC "calls to action."
- Sharing important CAC and National BOD updates with AMWA NorCal's BOD, including by reporting these updates and providing quarterly reports (which can be adapted minutes from the CAC meetings) to AMWA NorCal's BOD.

The CAC Representative is appointed by AMWA NorCal's President after discussion with other AMWA NorCal Officers. The term is for one year, begins after the conference, and is renewable. By August 1 of each year, each Chapter is required to identify its incoming CAC Representative.

Nancy will mentor the incoming CAC Representative.

For a full CAC Representative position description, please email me.

## Chapter Board of Directors and Chapter Leaders 2018-2019

<b>Elected Officers</b>	
President	Sandra Ruhl, RN
Immediate Past President	Nancy Katz, PhD, MWC
President-Elect	Andrea Johnson, BA
Secretary	Barbara Arnoldussen, DBA, MBA, RN
Treasurer	Rose Tomey, BA
Programs Chair	Maggie Norris, BSc, ELS
Programs Committee	Barbara Arnoldussen, DBA, MBA, RN; Viviana Bhatia, PhD; Barbara Boughton, BA; Nancy Katz, PhD, MWC; Caren Rickhoff, BA; Sandra Ruhl, RN; Joshua Schechtel, MD, MPH; Leslie Kowitz, MA, ELS
Communications Chair	Snehal Mohile, MBBS, MD (candidate), CPhT
Communications Committee	Suzanne Canada, PhD; Mimi Wessling, PhD; Myrna Faulds, PhD; Nicola Gillespie, DVM; Michele Anderson, BA, JD; Rashmi Gupta, PhD; Abe Jellinek, Sandra Ruhl, RN
<i>Pacemaker</i> Co-Editors	Mimi Wessling, Nisha Nair, BDS, MSc, MBA  and Michele Anderson, BA, JD
Membership Chair	Suzanne Canada, PhD
Jobs List Administrator	Caren Rickhoff, BA, MWC

### Letter From the Editors

Happy summer! This issue of *Pacemaker* provides an update on chapter activities by way of letters from our Chapter President. And please be sure to check out our Chapter Member Profile to learn about our new Chapter President, Nancy Katz.

Enjoy reading.

Kind regards,

Mimi and Nisha

### Free AMWA Resources

Did you know that **AMWA Online Learning** has many on-demand videos and articles available to members? The best part is that many of these resources are available for **FREE** to members!

Below are just a few of the complimentary resources available:

- Earning The MWC: What You Need to Know
- Editing and Organizing References in EndNote
- Editing Text and Reviewing Comments in Adobe Acrobat
- Eliminate Tedious, Manual Processes from Medical Authoring
- Exploring A Career in Medical Communication
- From Bench Science to Medical Writer: Career Alternatives for Life Scientists!
- Guidelines for Document Designers
- How to Find the Best Journal for Your Scientific Manuscript
- How to Modernize Document Quality Review and Handle Change Management
- Leveraging LinkedIn

To see all the complimentary offerings, check out the online course catalog [here](#).



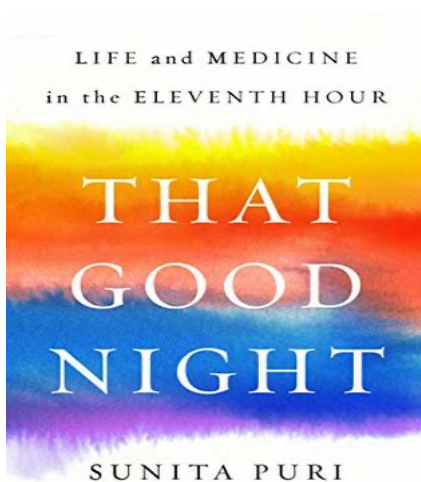
Check out our Northern California LinkedIn Group!



Contact our Membership Chair, [Suzanne Canada](#), for more information.

## Book Nook – That Good Night

*That Good Night: Life and Medicine in the Eleventh Hour*, by Sunita Puri (New York: Viking Press, 2019)



*That Good Night* is a simultaneously a memoir and a meditation on the author’s journey from medical student to practitioner of palliative care medicine. Sunita Puri describes the point of view taught in her medical school years: The physician’s job was to “manipulate, control, and postpone death, not to accept it as inevitable.” This medicine, as in Dylan Thomas’ poem, does not allow the patient to “go gentle into that good night...” but to “rage, rage against the dying of the light.” By contrast, palliative medicine accepts that “life is a temporary gift,” a medicine where the patient is guided to an understanding of what can and cannot be done without inflicting unnecessary pain and

suffering. Deep and thoughtful reading is required to process the meaning of a three-part structure built on 13 short meditative sections. For Puri, this reconceptualization does not occur linearly and logically. The first two sections are examples of her writing technique:



integrating threads of personal experiences in medicine training and practice, memories of her upbringing in an inherited Hindu culture, and interactions with patients and their families in the final stages of incurable illness. In the first section, “Shift,” Puri is introduced to the palliative care approach toward the end of her fourth year of medical school. Still uncertain which medical specialty she would ultimately choose for her residency, and even whether she would choose to become a physician, she takes a two-week rotation with the palliative care team at the University of California, San Francisco.

### **Patient-centered approach**

Working with the physician in charge of palliative care, Puri experiences for the first time a patient-centered approach: the interaction with Donna, a critically ill woman who has undergone repeated dialysis and was at the point where she wanted to stop. The doctor led the discussion in a case where there was no possible hope for a cure, but still wanted Donna to realize what stopping dialysis would portend. The “shift,” then, refers to the displacement of focus from the science of medicine and multiple treatments described in documentation to listening to what the patient wants. Puri hears language used very differently during the 45-minute interview. She experiences what it would mean to care for a dying patient not by extending treatment but, instead, by listening to the patient’s readiness to stop treating the intractable illness and to seek comfort and relief from pain in life’s final hours—the “good night” of the book’s title. The second section, “Words,” introduces another important thread: the way that her family life and culture played a part in her coming to an understanding of how she wanted to practice medicine. Her parents had fled their native Punjab to escape the violence that accompanied the partition of India and Pakistan in 1947—a violence that claimed more than a million lives. Puri’s father was an engineer, her mother, an anesthesiologist; after their move to the United States, both retained a deeply spiritual focus on life and death. Her father took over the duties of caring for Puri and her younger brother while her mother worked a punishing schedule, often 30 hours long. He introduced Puri, at a very young age, to the understanding that life and death were part of the “natural order of things...the sooner you learn this lesson, the more you will value each moment in life, knowing that it is a temporary gift.” In the beginning of her internship, she cares for Mr. Tan, a patient severely disabled by a stroke and a subsequent fungal infection. Unable to speak, he communicates with her by writing on a whiteboard. Unlike the dialysis patient we met in the first section, Mr. Tan is determined to leave the hospital alive.

### **An honest talk**

Puri struggles to find the words to have an honest talk with him. She debates with herself: What are the words a “good doctor” would use to give Mr. Tan an honest appraisal of his situation without destroying his dream of the almost-impossible reprieve? Finally, she confronts Mr. Tan with the question: Did he ever think about the possibility that medical

treatment would not make him better? He responds that he would suffer only if she gave up on him. She is left with the feeling that she did not have any tools to bridge the gap between the medicine she had been taught to practice on the patient's physical body and the patient's unseen inner world. And despite appearing that he was in his final days, Mr. Tan lived to attend his daughter's college graduation. In the ensuing sections, each with a meaningful descriptive name, Puri struggles with the conflict between her "do no harm" oath in cases where ineffective and painful treatments are demanded by patients' family members.

### **Finding the right words**

Palliative care strives to find the right words to keep the patient and family informed, as well as to avoid unnecessary treatments and, primarily, to provide the patient with as much quality of life and comfort possible in the last days up to that "good night" when death occurs. She rages against an insurance system that will not assist persons in lower socioeconomic groups with financial support that would ease their burden of trying to care for critically ill family members while working tiring and demanding jobs. Puri preemptively recalls, at the end of the fifth section "The Unlearning," what she learned during her progression from fellowship recipient to intern to member of a palliative care team. To listen to the patient, the physician has "no script, no training course" but learns to rely on inner strength gained from overcoming "intersecting, interlocked circles of loss, grief, anger, fear, sadness, regret." In the ensuing sections, she describes at length experiences with patients, their families, and other physicians who can be unwilling to accept her approach; she has realized that she can internalize setbacks and turn them into the strengths needed to be an effective palliative care physician. One of the formidable challenges she faces is to redefine words in the context of end-of-life decisions. In the aptly named section, Puri meditates on notion of "fight" — a word she hears often from her patients and their families. That word generates inner conflicts over compassion versus resentment when she meets lack of cooperation and resistance in conversations about palliative care versus ineffectual treatments. She understands that it's built into the body as the resistance against invading disease entities and into the emotional life of patients seeking dignity and self-esteem.

### **Wanting 'everything done' dilemma**

What words to use with insistent family members who want "everything done" when the patient cannot survive to live without machine support after an unsuccessful series of treatments. Extended descriptions of her interaction with her parents led me to contemplate the last few sections of the book as a unit. In "The Grip of Life," Puri meets the family of a woman from her parents' native Punjab who had had a life-threatening brain hemorrhage. Puri becomes very close to them, calling them "Auntie" and "Uncle" in keeping with the Indian tradition, and especially to Anu, Auntie's daughter.

Encouraged by Puri's understanding of their dilemma: how could Auntie, who could not speak, tell them what she would want them to do? Ultimately, they decide against intubation; they soften Auntie's last days by bringing her beloved dog to the ICU. Anu's deeply felt gratitude has a different effect on Puri than the usual thanks she gets after the decision to go with palliative care rather than further intervention.

### **Family members' struggle**

Watching the family members struggle with the decision to discontinue treatment brings her own parents to mind: What would she do if one of her apparently healthy parents was suddenly stricken like Auntie? Quite coincidentally, she has accepted a new job in the same hospital complex where her mother had practiced. Puri will be a member of a palliative care team where she will take on a teaching role with younger physicians. After a serious conversation about life and death with her parents, the threads of family, professional training, and culture-based spirituality that have been winding through the sections have come together. Her mother and father have already concluded they would accept death and not seek futile and painful treatments. Puri recalls the spirit of the Bhagavad Gita: "You must confront the fact of your inevitable aging and eventual death." Death is common to us all; hearing the right words can make it that good night. Puri has at last gained confidence that she will find those words.

For further reading:

- *Knocking on Heaven's Door: The Path to a Better Way of Death*, by Katy Butler (New York: Scribner, 2013). Butler describes her anger with "conveyor belt medicine" through recounting the misery her mother suffered as caregiver to her husband, who had been left with only his heart pumping away through an implanted pacemaker.
- *The Art of Dying Well: A Practical Guide to a Good End of Life* (New York: Scribner, 2019), by Katy Butler. This book is organized in chapters, each offering practical advice to people in different stages of later life.

## **Point of View – Sanil Pillai**

### **In Praise of Serendipity**

I was not supposed to be at this meeting. It had been called by a group in my organization to discuss the mobile strategy for an enterprise application, and I was not part of that group. The only reason I had a seat in that meeting was a water cooler comment about

mobile apps that I had made to one of my colleagues who happened to be attending that meeting. It turned out that I had a lot to contribute in that meeting and very soon I found myself changing groups to lead the mobile app effort.

Rest is history.

As I look back on my career, I can trace the roots to my career evolution to that mundane water cooler conversation.

This is serendipity.

Serendipity is the occurrence and development of events by chance in a happy or beneficial way, and it will play role in all careers, including medical writing and editing.

Careers are not always built upon carefully crafted strategies. They are also built through chance encounters with past colleagues, an invitation to a meeting that you didn't expect, meeting somebody in the elevator. As my mentor told me recently, one of the reasons for making any move is the possibility of experiencing serendipity.

These are some of the ways you could experience serendipity.

You come across an online course on a topic that interests you. You debate if the effort taking this course is worth it since you don't see a way to apply it to your current job. You take it, nevertheless, and complete the course. A few weeks down the line, you're asked to put a presentation together and you make it a killer presentation by using concepts from this course.

You get invited to a meeting that you're not sure if you should attend. You attend it, nevertheless, not expecting much. A slide pops up on the screen with some interesting statistics and that leads to an idea for a business and change in your career.

While walking back to your desk from the coffee machine, you notice a book lying on your colleague's desk. The title looks interesting and you make a note of it. A few days later, you buy the book and read it. It gives you a whole different perception about life and answers some of the questions that have been haunting you for a while.

You have been thinking about pursuing an advanced degree but have been putting it off since you're not sure if the demands of work and family will give you enough bandwidth to pursue education. A few weeks later, your school classmate is in town and you decide

to meet for lunch. Guess what, he just finished the same degree and with a far more punishing work-family schedule than you. You leave the lunch convinced that you can do it.

As part of your daily diet of reading career blogs, you come across an article titled “Serendipity in Your Career.” It sparks the realization that in making a move, any move is the first step toward creating change. Make that move and reach out: You never know if serendipity awaits you.

*Sanil Pillai is the CEO of 99minds, a career well-being and coaching company in the San Francisco Bay Area.*

### Member Profile—Nancy R. Katz

Nancy R Katz was the chapter president twice and is now serving as the Immediate Past President along with additional responsibility as the chair of the Bylaws committee.

- How did you get into medical writing?  
**I taught English, including scientific writing, at the college and university level for 25 years. It became time for a change. I learned about AMWA, took courses, and got hired as a medical writer.**
- Tell us how you got involved with AMWA.  
**I don't remember who first told me about AMWA; AMWA has been part of my consciousness since before I became a medical writer. But I do remember my first AMWA course: Edie Schwager came to SF and taught her “Usage and Abusage” course. Unforgettable woman!!**
- What, in your opinion, are the key features every member should make use of?  
**Education and connection. AMWA is the resource for ongoing education in our field.**
- What type of medical writing or editing do you do?  
**Mainly regulatory writing, especially Module 2 summaries for drug applications and ISEs and ISSs; also, some publications for peer-reviewed journals. Lately, I've also been working on CERs and other documents related to medical devices.**
- Could you please share an anecdote/epiphany from your tenure?  
**A drug I worked on got approved. The energy spent filing the application was enormous. And I knew it was worth it.**



- What do you love to do during your free time?  
**Hike in the Sierra Nevada mountains; spend time with my grandchildren.**
- What do you think others should know regarding AMWA?  
**A connection to this generous and intelligent group of likeminded people—who are passionate about communicating scientific matters clearly and accurately—provides sustenance, personal and professional growth, and perspective.**
- Finally, a message for our members.  
**Same as above. Our chapter is great. Please join us.**

### Welcome New Members!



Lara Rajeev

Matthew Wygant

Victoria Butler

Sarah Shires

Meenakshi Srivastava

Dhivya Haridass

Eric Harvey

Oreanna Thomas

Toni Nouri

Martin Waits

Devashri Prabhudesai

Steven Drury

Patricia Byrd

Geraldine Cadalin

Bethany Collins

Cynthia Cam

Roxanne Nelson

Kelley Sewell

Christine Costigan

Lisa English

Courtney McBean

Mary Woten

Michelle Leung

Lenton Morrow

Bryce Williams

DeeAnn Visk

Oreoluwa Ogunyemi