

## President's Message

Catherine Magill, PhD



I just spent a week away from my home and home office attending several AMWA meetings and would like to relay to you some of the things that I have learned.

First, I spent Sunday through Wednesday (3/30-4/2) at the annual Asilomar conference, which this year was hosted by the Northern California chapter (as we do biannually). Of the four regional conferences that I have attended since I joined AMWA in 2005, this was my favorite. Not only is Asilomar absolutely gorgeous and relaxing but this conference was particularly interesting, and, as might be expected knowing more people in the chapter, more enjoyable from a personal point of view.

This was the first conference where I didn't attend any workshops, but thanks to Dan Liberthson, the open sessions were broad-ranging and engaging. Naomi Ruff did an excellent job with the organization of the whole event. As a member of the conference committee, I got to see first-hand the amount of work that goes into staging a conference like this. Thanks to Naomi's dedication and attention to detail, the result was wonderful.

Attendance was down a bit this year over previous years, which may be due to the economy or changes in the way conferences are announced by the National organization, but I imagine that everyone who attended this conference feels the same as I do: If I have to choose one professional event for the year, it would be this one, hands-down.

It is well worth the expense and time from many points of view, but the opportunity to network with other medical writers in such an intimate setting is priceless. I would also like to put in a plug for participating on the conference committee

—having the chance to work closely with the other members was a good opportunity to get to know them better and helps strengthen my network within AMWA. The work was extended over quite some time and wasn't overwhelming. Participating in this manner helped me delve into the conference at a level that I hadn't done before. I can't recommend helping out with the conference highly enough!

Secondly, I had the opportunity to attend the annual spring Board of Directors meeting, which was held in Gaithersburg, MD on April 4 and 5. This was my third Board of Directors meeting, and I now feel like I have a good understanding of what is going on within the larger organization. I believe that we had members from all the chapters of AMWA, after the recent revitalization of the Michigan chapter. Board meetings are a great way to check in with other chapters to see how they handle the various issues that come up for all of us at one time or another.

The two main topics for discussion were the National organization's finances and the Annual Conference.

The organization is in very good shape financially—we have a solid reserve and our investments are doing well. Our expenses were somewhat higher this year than last year, but the good news is that the Science Certificate program is doing very well and AMWA's main source of revenue, the Annual Conference, made enough to keep operations running.

Last fall's Annual Conference in Atlanta had higher expenses than the previous one in Albuquerque, but this was expected and overall the conference made money so it's not a worry. Incidentally, several of the talks from the past few years are posted on the AMWA website in case you missed them and would like to hear what was said. They can be found under AMWA>Conferences>Annual Conference Lectures in the members-only section.

AMWA will offer several new items this year, which are funded by interest earned from the Endowment Fund. In 2007, the Fund finally exceeded the \$85K that was targeted as our

goal. Meeting that initial funding goal finally allows us to use the interest to fund special projects.

The first of these is to develop a searchable archive of the Dear Edie columns from the *AMWA Journal*, which people have enjoyed so much over the years. The indexing process is already underway.

Secondly, we are setting up several webinars, the first of which was last year's introduction to the 10th Edition of *AMA's Manual of Style*, by Cheryl Iverson and Annette Flanagin. Their slides are posted on the AMWA website under AMWA>Membership>Webinar AMA Manual of Style.

This year we will hold a "Dear Edie Live" webinar, targeted for May 29. Edie will give a short presentation and then open the webinar to questions from the audience. She has agreed to pull some interesting and relevant visual materials from her personal archives, which should add even more color to her presentation. This webinar is expected to draw a large audience.

The second webinar, which will probably be held in August, will likely be on a topic related to electronic Common Technical Document submission. It will be led by a representative of the FDA (CDER); planning is still in progress.

As for this year's Annual Conference, which will be held in Louisville, KY things are looking very good. The overall theme is "Setting the Pace" due to Louisville's association with horse racing. The program is almost completely in place and it looks like a terrific meeting. This year's conference will include activities related to personal healthcare, such as blood pressure screening, etc.

We only had a handful of poster submissions, so the poster session will be small, but there will be eight new workshops, all part of the Science Curriculum (offered on a not-for-credit basis).

Outside the conference there will be six tours of the Louisville area: (1) breakfast at Churchill Downs, and tours of (2) the Louisville Glass Works, (3) the Cardiovascular Innovation Institute at the University of Louisville, (4) the Paris Simulation Center at the University of Louisville Health Science Campus (supports training of current and future healthcare professionals), (5) Heaven Hill Distilleries and the Bourbon Heritage Center, and (6) the Kentucky Horse Park.

There were also several other topics discussed at the Board of Directors meeting, the first of which was the AMWA Code of Ethics. This discussion is summarized in another article in this issue of *The Pacemaker*.

We also discussed new member recruitment, how to encourage more people to attend events and meetings and hopefully join the organization. Many chapters have done outreach at colleges and universities, particularly ones that have existing medical/scientific communication programs.

It was also suggested that we contact career development offices, which occasionally put on events highlighting different career options. Having an AMWA member discuss medical writing and AMWA can be a great way to get the word out.

Finally we had a good meeting of the Chapter Delegates. We discussed ideas for spending the Chapter Travel fund, which is a small fund set aside to help chapters send a delegate to the annual meeting, if necessary.

This fund has been growing and there has been some discussion about other ways to spend it for the benefit of members. Potential uses are scholarships to attend the Annual Conference, regional conferences or other chapter events.

To this end, we will hold a "Member Needs Assessment" survey. I would strongly encourage you to take this survey. A link to the survey, hosted by SurveyMonkey.com, will be emailed within a month or so. Your candid responses to this survey will allow us to more effectively serve our members' needs.

How seriously do we take these responses? The concept of the Science Curriculum came from this type of survey.

We were also reminded to point out the location of the "Willingness to Serve" questionnaire, which is posted on the website under AMWA>Members Only>Membership>Willingness to Serve.

Your responses to this questionnaire are how we match members with jobs or roles in AMWA for which they have expressed an interest. There are many small and not so small jobs, all of which are important to keep this vibrant all-volunteer organization as active as it is. If you haven't filled out one out of these questionnaires recently, please do so.

All in all, it was a busy week, with no direct remuneration, but participating in this organization at both the chapter and

national levels gives me a sense of doing something constructive in support of my career. I'm confident that it will eventually pay off professionally as well as it has personally.

### Did you know?

Members of AMWA have access to:

- Harrison's Online - the complete contents of Harrison's *Principles of Internal Medicine*, 17th edition
- 30% discount on individual subscriptions to MDConsult
- 50% discount on Reference Manager(r) or Endnote(r) bibliographic database software
- 25% discount on full-text article delivery from GKDocuments
- 20% discount on the *AMA Manual of Style*, 10th edition

See the Members Only page on the AMWA website for links and more details.

### Wilderness Medicine Kicks of Pacific Coast Conference

Mimi Wessling, PhD

As medical writers, we typically work with materials that had their origins in a hospital or clinic, with plenty of the technological advances of modern medicine at hand available to patients and their well-trained medical professionals. Dr. Paul Auerbach, the keynote speaker at the 2008 Asilomar conference, introduced us to a way of practicing medicine that has only one thing in common with medicine in the modern hospital: the well-trained professionals.

Snake bites, falling through the ice on a fishing trip (a frequent accident among people I knew when living in Michigan), getting injured while skiing or mountain climbing... here is the stuff of wilderness medicine.

Speaking of falling through the ice, Dr. Auerbach shared a video of a demonstration of an appropriate rescue technique. Yes, a wilderness physician actually jumped through a thin spot and directed a group of rescuers how to go about pulling him out. It was a chilling experience, even second-hand.

Not all of Dr. Auerbach's presentation was staged video. While on a climb in Tibet, he was the victim of contaminated food. His life was saved by the generosity of a Buddhist monk who gave him a golden Buddha—and a blister pack of Cipro!

If you're interested in learning about wilderness medicine, check the Wilderness Medical Society website, [www.wms.org](http://www.wms.org), or delve into one of Dr. Auerbach's many books.

### Coast to Coast Cost-free Courses

The Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and UC Berkeley have made some of their courses available online for your learning pleasure—and at the best price of all: Free!

Some of the courses currently available through MIT's Open Courseware (OCW) include:

- DNA Damage Checkpoints: The Emergency Brake on the Road to Cancer
- The Fountain of Life: From Dolly to Customized Embryonic Stem Cells
- Neural Basis of Vision and Audition
- Design of Medical Devices and Implants
- Information Technology in the Health Care System of the Future

Older courses (taught in 2001 to 2003) available through the archives include:

- Neurology, Neuropsychology, and Neurobiology of Aging
- Biochemistry and Pharmacology of Synaptic Transmission
- Developmental Neurobiology
- Gastroenterology
- Genetic Neurobiology
- Principles of Pharmacology
- Cellular and Molecular Immunology
- Quantitative Physiology: Cells and Tissues

To find out more about OCW, visit <http://ocw.mit.edu/OcwWeb/web/home/home/index.htm>.

In our own backyard, UC Berkeley has several courses available via webcast and podcast. Courses for spring 2008 include:

- Cell Biology
- Introduction to Human Nutrition
- Developmental Psychopathology

Courses of interest from prior terms include:

- Epidemiologic Methods I
- General Genetics

- General Human Anatomy
- Structural Aspects of Biomaterials

To find out more about UC Berkeley's course offerings, visit <http://webcast.berkeley.edu>

### Asilomar Splits its Sides

The wonderful (and infamous) skit viewed by those fortunate enough to be at the Pacific Coast Conference at Asilomar is now available via streaming video or by download.

Our thanks to Sunil Patel, writer, director, and producer, the AMWA players, and Barbara Arnoldusson for the video!

### Getting from Rejection to Revision

Mimi Wessling, PhD

Pacific Coast Conference open session speaker Genevieve Bjorn, MS provided multiple insights on how to go "from rejection to revision." Her focus was on Web writing, examining how readers interact differently with text on the screen as opposed to text on the page.

Bjorn looked at ways to make medical writing for the Web more effective, writing Web page content, creating scripts, and crafting interactive material.

Studies by Jakob Nielsen and others have revealed that there are two kinds of readers of Web material, she explained: methodical readers and scanners. Writers must consider both types. We need to look at placement, column width, white space, and color choices, Bjorn said. We should also eliminate at least half of "to be" verbs and use rollovers instead of clicks to bring up linked material.

The hot field of writing medical scripts also has its way-to-do-it-best, conceptualized as a series of three questions:

- Why is the disease state important?
- What is the problem that needs resolution?
- What solves the problem?

We're telling a story with every script, Bjorn explained. And just like every successful storyteller, the medical writer must pick out the basic elements of the story before starting to write. It is that essential preplanning and preplotting of the

story line that makes the difference between a successful script and one more yawner.

Interactive material is another area where medical writers need to hone our techniques to a non-print application. The goal is to engage the learner in performing an action, which encourages deeper involvement than simply reading. That means including quizzes and tests to activate other centers of learning. The most successful interactive materials involve multiple senses to heighten critical thinking.

Finally, blogging is yet another way that medical writers can expand their purview: it's more than a fun outlet; it's a way to reach new audiences.

For more information, please see [www.genevivebjorn.com](http://www.genevivebjorn.com).

### The Tomales Bay Writers' Workshops 2008

#### October 22-27, 2008, Marconi Center, Tomales Bay

The Creative Writing Program at the University of California, Davis and its director, Pam Houston, will present The Tomales Bay Writers' Workshops in October of 2008. The event brings writers into close community with nationally known poets, writers, editors, and agents for five days of intensive conversation about craft.

Pulitzer Prize winner Jane Smiley, author of "A Thousand Acres," "Horse Heaven" and most recently "Ten Days in the Hills" will be this year's keynote speaker. Pam Houston is the author of the novel, "Sight Hound," and two collections of linked short stories, "Cowboys Are My Weakness" and "Waltzing the Cat."

The faculty includes:

- Dorothy Allison, "Bastard Out of Carolina," "Cavedweller" and "Two or Three Things I Know For Sure"
- Vikram Chandra, "Love and Longing in Bombay," "Sacred Games" and "Red Earth and Pouring Rain"
- Camille T. Dungy, "What to Eat, What to Drink, What to Leave for Poison"
- Gary Ferguson, "The Great Divide: The Rocky Mountains in the American Mind," "Hawks Rest" and "Shouting at the Sky"
- Greg Glazner, "From the Iron Chair" and "Singularity"
- T. M. McNally, "The Gateway," "The Goat Bridge" and "Quick"

The workshops will be held at the Marconi Conference Center in Marshall, on the eastern shore of Tomales Bay, just north of San Francisco. Applications are due June 16, 2008.

For more information, visit UC Davis Extension's Web site at [http://extension.ucdavis.edu/unit/arts\\_and\\_humanities/](http://extension.ucdavis.edu/unit/arts_and_humanities/) or call (800) 752-0881.

### **Chapter Report: Spring 2008 March 6, 2008**

At the two annual Board of Directors meetings, each chapter submits a report on its activities and status. Here is our chapter's report from the spring meeting:

#### Board of Directors

The election for the 2008 Board of Directors was done through SurveyMonkey ([www.surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com)) and voting was open from October 8 - 22, 2007. We had a great turnout with more than twice as many members—60—voting as in the last two elections.

All nominees were elected:

- President: Catherine Magill, PhD
- Vice President (and president-elect): Elizabeth Matovinovic
- Secretary: Barbara Boughton
- Treasurer: Sunny Bishop
- Membership Liaison: Rene McCabe
- Programs Chair: Paula Zimlicki
- Newsletter Editor: Fred Gebhart

#### Non-elected positions

- Immediate past-president: Laura Singer
- Web-mistress: Mimi Wessling, PhD

#### Bylaws

Additionally, we voted on amending the bylaws, to bring us into compliance with the National Bylaws. The amended bylaws were approved and have been sent to national for their approval. Once the amended bylaws are finalized, they'll be posted to the Chapter web site, [www.amwancal.org](http://www.amwancal.org), and we'll have a notice in the newsletter.

The amended Bylaws are as follows:

Add to Section VII, Meetings:

"The Chapter will comply with the national AMWA policy regarding the scheduling of major meetings in the specified

time period before or after the annual conference. Specifically, chapter conferences where workshops are offered or seminars lasting more than one-half day will not be held within 30 days of the annual conference."

Article VIII, Amendments, section 2:

Change "Proposed amendments to these Bylaws shall take effect immediately on approval by the Chapter membership and the AMWA National Board." to "If proposed amendments (to the bylaws) are approved by majority of chapter members who cast votes, the proposed amendment shall be forwarded to the National Board of Directors. Any amendments to chapter bylaws require the approval of the National Board of Directors as indicated in the National Bylaws."

#### Membership

The Northern California Chapter currently has about 250 members, with 42 new members since July.

#### Financial status

Between the beginning of the fiscal year (July 1, 2007) and February 2008 the chapter had \$5165.60 in expenses and \$5621.57 in income. The chapter's bank balance was \$13,869.30 on February 11, 2008.

Note: Although the chapter sponsors and hosts the Pacific Coast Conference this year (and does so every other year), the monies for that event are handled separately from the chapter funds.

#### Programs

Our chapter programs are generally held during the day on a weekend, and we rotate between San Francisco, the South Bay and the East Bay, thus encouraging attendance from members in various regions of Northern California.

Since the last report (September 15, 2007), the chapter has held 2 events with educational content and 1 social:

- October 27, 2007  
Brunch in San Francisco followed by a presentation titled "Computer Health and Well-Being." This event was extremely

successful, with 22 people attending. The cost was \$30.00 for members and \$35.00 for non-members.

- December 1, 2007

We purchased 15 tickets to the Body Worlds 2 exhibition at the San Jose Tech Museum (the exhibit of human bodies preserved by a new method of plastination and displayed very artistically). Ten people purchased tickets at \$19.50, but only 6 attended at the time specified. Several people went out for happy hour together afterwards.

- January 28, 2008

Lunch and bocce ball social at Campo di Bocce in Livermore. The cost was \$40.00 and nine people attended.

We have discussed concerns regarding the low turnout at the last two events, as both these events were widely advertised by e-mail and in the newsletter, and posted on the website. Apparently, our members are more willing to spend their time and money on events that have an educational component than purely social events.

We are continuing with our plan of offering a program roughly every other month, alternating between a “learn-a-skill” event, a science event and a social event. We surveyed members last year regarding what events they would be likely to attend and will continue to try to offer those suggested events, as well as other interesting events that arise through monitoring other chapter’s event suggestions.

Ideas for upcoming meetings:

#### MOST LIKELY TO ATTEND

- Mary Roach (14)
- Ethics and medical writing (13)
- Effect of market research on drug development (13)
- Project management (11)
- Alternative/complimentary medicine (11)
- Writing for medical device companies (11)
- The female brain (9)
- Patient management & communication in diabetes (9)

#### TOP ALTERNATIVE TOPICS

- New developments in asthma
- Autism

- Health and disability insurance
- Communications in clinical trials
- Issues in translation
- Desk-bound yoga

#### Communications

We have come close to our goal of publishing a newsletter every other month, publishing issues in September, December and February, and expect to have another issue out before the end of April.

In mid-September we discovered that the email distribution system we had been using no longer worked, probably due to the change in website hosts. This has been solved through working with the new website host.

We hosted this year’s Pacific Coast conference at the Asilomar Conference Center, in Pacific Grove, CA, held March 30 to April 2, 2008. The conference included 4 AMWA curriculum workshops and 9 open sessions.

The new board has held one full board meeting, a teleconference on February 11.

### Tour Word's Table Properties Dialog Box

Maggie Norris

Word sometimes offers more automation and flexibility than we want. Using the **Table Properties** dialog box can damp down some of Word’s spontaneity.

Like most of the items on the **Table** menu, the **Table Properties** dialog box is available only when the insertion point (cursor) is in a table. To explore the power of this dialog box, insert a new table (**Table | Insert | Table**) or call up a favorite table. The **Table Properties** dialog box has four tabs: **Table**, **Row**, **Column**, and **Cell**.

#### Table Tab

With the insertion point in the table, call up the **Table Properties** dialog box: **Table | Table Properties**.

The dialog box opens by default to the **Table** tab. Choose options here that affect some major things about the table format, like its size and alignment on the screen or page.

## Size

When you don't know or are not concerned about the width of the table, leave **Preferred Width** deactivated.

When you activate **Preferred Width**, a scaling box and a drop-down list **Measure in** become available.

In the drop-down list, choose **Percent**.

In the scaling box, choose **100%**. Click **OK** to save the settings and close the dialog box.

This table will be automatically resized if you change the page width (right and left margins).

I have not found a use for the alternative choice here, **Inches**. It doesn't do what I would expect, which is to keep the table at the specified width. Happily, Word has other ways to do that. (Check out **Table | Autofit**.)

## Alignment

Choose whether you want the table aligned left (the best choice in most situations), centered, or aligned right.

If you choose **Left**, a scaling box on the right allows you to specify an indent from the left margin. In most situations, choose **0** to keep the table aligned along the left page margin.

## Text wrapping

For technical documents, choose **None** to cause the table to remain in place vertically in relation to the surrounding text. This means the table will always display and print between the 2 paragraphs it is now between.

## Borders and Shading

Clicking the **Borders and Shading** button calls up another dialog box. This dialog box is a topic for another day.

If you're not familiar with the borders and shading options, schedule some time to experiment. It is even possible to change from the default 4-sided-border-around-every-cell to something more readable and pleasing.

## Options

Click the **Options** button to call up the **Table Options** dialog box. Here is where you can improve the readability of tables.

By specifying default top and bottom cell margins, you can build in some horizontal "white space" (visual breathing room) into your table. If you have been attempting to add white space

with paragraph formatting (Space above, Space below), you may want to pull **Table Options** into the toolbox as well. The default can be overridden, if necessary, in individual cells.

Before you click **OK**, notice the checkbox labeled **Automatically resize ...**. Always deactivate any "Automatic" option unless you know exactly what it does.

## Row tab

Options selected in the **Row** tab will be applied to the row containing the insertion point or to all selected rows.

## Size

To specify the height of one or more rows, select the row(s), then click on the **Row** tab.

Activate **Specify height**; make appropriate entries in the scaling box and dropdown list. Before you click **OK**, notice the **Previous Row** and **Next Row** buttons, which include arrows. Use the arrows to move the insertion point from one row to another to apply row height settings to other rows.

Take a minute to look at the other settings on this tab.

## Allow Row to Break Across Pages

We recommend that you deactivate **Allow row to break across pages**. The setting will apply to the selected row(s).

In most cases, you should deactivate this checkbox for the entire table: **Table | Select | Table. Table | Table Properties | Row**. Deactivate the checkbox.

## Repeat as header row

If you have a multi-page table, you may want the column headings row to display at the top of each page on which the table appears. To do this, first close all dialog boxes and return to your table. Place the insertion point in the header row (or select the entire row).

Navigate to the **Row** tab. Activate **Repeat as header row**. Click **OK** to save the setting. Close the **Table Properties** dialog box.

## Column tab

This tab allows you to specify the width of each column. If you are editing a table and the column resists resizing, check the settings on this tab.

### Cell tab

This tab allows you to apply formatting settings to an individual cell, or to a group of selected cells. For example, you can apply different cell margins or change the vertical alignment of the text. (Sometimes column headings are bottom-aligned while all other rows and top-aligned.) Changing the width of just one cell, however, generally results in a change to the entire column.

### Want a Shot at Winning \$200? In Cash?

Complete AMWA's online membership survey and qualify for a drawing to win 1 of 4 prizes!

National's confidential, anonymous, online survey gives you an opportunity to share your thoughts and to provide other information that will help AMWA to future events and services. Participating in the drawing will not jeopardize anonymity because the drawing procedure uses a separate process to capture your entry. A lot of associations claim to value your input and look forward to your participation...but AMWA is putting money on the line. Don't miss out on your chance to win—or to help shape the future of AMWA.

### How Green Is AMWA?

We're getting there. The Northern California Chapter has produced this newsletter online rather than on paper for several years. That saves resources, time, and money. We like to think that we have set a good example.

At the national level, AMWA has long used recycled paper for the majority of its printing projects, including the *AMWA Journal*, which is also available online.

In the past 2 years, AMWA began posting the conference registration brochure online and introduced its electronic newsletter, which has replaced the monthly membership mailing. Together, these programs have resulted in the reduction of 6,500 pounds of paper per year, as well as decreasing our consumption of other resources such as oil and electricity.

### Now On Line: Conference Schedules Nationwide

The complete schedule for AMWA's Annual Conference, Oct. 23 to 25 in Louisville, KY, is now posted on the AMWA website. So are schedules for AMWA chapter conferences around the country.

Next up are Carolinas Chapter, Mid-America Chapter, and Northwest Chapter conferences, all scheduled for May 2 and/or May 3.

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

*The Pacemaker*, our Northern California chapter newsletter, needs your help!

Please send your suggestions and submissions to editor Fred Gebhart, [pacemaker@amwancal.org](mailto: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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