



CAROLINA CONNECTIONS

Carolinas Chapter—American Medical Writers Association

September 2007

President's Message

By Tara Hun-Dorris

This newsletter contains results from our membership survey and also discusses actions we are taking in response to the results. As a regional chapter of a national association, it is very important that we make AMWA Carolinas accessible and relevant to our membership and we continue to strive to do so. We also continue to look for new volunteers and leaders within the chapter; please contact me if you are willing to serve (please see Call for Nomi-

nations, below). As the chapter continues to grow in scope and membership, I am pleased to announce 2 new initiatives:

Member Outreach

Are you a member of the AMWA Carolinas Chapter who wants to be more active in networking with other members but feels physically distanced from the Raleigh-Durham-Chapel Hill location where most chapter events occur? AMWA Carolinas

Connect is a new program aimed at bringing you closer to other chapter members in your community. The chapter will provide you with the contact information of other locals interested in networking with fellow AMWA members, and you can get together for a meal, a cup of coffee, or to attend a local social or professional event. If you are interested in this

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Call for Nominations, 2007–2008 Officers; Available Chapter Positions

AMWA Carolinas is seeking nominations for 2007–2008 officers. The offices to be filled are:

- President-elect
- Secretary
- Treasurer

Please contact Tara Hun-Dorris at tara@thdeditorial.com by **September 18** if you are interested in running and willing to serve.

Ballots will be distributed by email on September 20 and responses must be emailed back by **September 27**. The responses will be tabulated and the results announced on the [AMWA Caro-](#)

[linas Website](#) and by e-mail to the listserv by October 1.

Please let your voice be heard during this important process.

* * *

There are 2 other (nonofficer) positions that are open. These are:

- Newsletter editor
- Web boss

Again, please email Tara if you are interested in serving in either capacity. These positions represent an opportunity for you to express your creativity and serve the chapter at the same time.

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National AMWA Conference Preview

By Pat French

AMWA has chosen “A Legacy of Leadership” as the theme for its 67th Annual Conference, to be held October 11–13 in Atlanta. This theme reflects AMWA’s longstanding tradition of education and professional development of medical communicators.

In addition to the usual receptions, Creative Reading Session, Breakfast Roundtables, poster sessions, lunches, open sessions, and workshops, AMWA is launching a new Science Fundamentals certificate program at this

year’s conference. Through this series of workshops, experienced medical communicators can deepen their understanding of basic concepts in science/medicine while newcomers receive an orientation that paves the way for further study.

On the lighter side, AMWA has arranged for 8 exciting tours for attendees, including 2 medical-related opportunities. Visit Atlanta landmarks such as the CNN studios or the World of Coca-Cola, or spend a relaxing after-

noon at the Botanical Garden. There’s something for everyone.

Note: this year, laptop computers will be allowed for note-taking at the discretion of workshop or open-session leaders.

Early-bird registration rates are available only until September 12, so act now! Visit the [Annual Conference site](#) for more information.

Holiday Party December 7!

This year, instead of our usual roundtable dinner in December, AMWA Carolinas will be hosting its first holiday party in honor of our 30th anniversary! On Friday, December 7, from 7 to 11 pm,

you and a guest are invited to join us at the Edgehill Farm Clubhouse, [391 Edgehill Parkway, Cary](#), for an evening of talk, music, fun, and letting our hair down. Drinks and snacks will be

provided. We hope you can join us in this celebration of the holiday season. Please RSVP to [Tara Hun-Dorris](#) by **December 1** if you plan to attend.

Upcoming Events

AMWA Carolinas has many important, informative, and fun events coming up soon. We hope to see you at one or more of these! Please see our [Website](#) for more details as more events are added.

Sep 13	Bimonthly networking lunch, Azitra, Raleigh. Noon.
Sep 13	OTC Reader’s Group, Weathervane, Chapel Hill. 6:30 pm.
Oct 4	Bimonthly networking dinner, NeoChina, Cary. 6:30 pm. <u>Theme</u> : Scope of Medical Communications. <u>Speaker</u> : Deana Betterton-Lewis, Medical Writer, UCB.
Oct 11–13	National AMWA Conference, Atlanta, Georgia (see above for more info).
Nov 1	Bimonthly networking lunch, Place: TBA. Noon.
Dec 7	AMWA Carolinas Holiday Party, Edgehill Farm Clubhouse , Cary. 7 pm (see above for more info).

Getting Started in Medical Writing: Experiences of AMWA Members

By Carol Bader

What was your first medical writing job, and how did you get it?

I was hired as a writer for a contract research organization in Atlanta. I answered an advertisement in the *Atlanta Constitution* for a clinical research associate, but the company also had an opening for a medical writer. I had worked in the editorial department of a medical publisher, and the medical writing position was a better fit.

What is your current position, and what skills are needed for it?

I am currently a senior medical writer at Schwarz Biosciences and am responsible for writing clinical submissions documents, including protocols, clinical trial reports, and integrated summaries of efficacy and safety. I have a

bachelor's degree in biology and a master's degree in zoology, and previously worked as a respiratory care practitioner in a hospital as well as in medical publishing. I don't think you need a science degree to be a medical writer, but I think you need to have an interest in science and medicine, and be willing to learn. As a writer, I think you need to be detail-oriented and have good project and time-management skills.

If you were to hire someone without much experience, what would you look for?

I'd look for someone who loves to write. If the person does not have any medical writing experience, what type of writing experience do they have? Do they have a background in journalism or English? Have they written for a

newsletter or local paper? I'd also look for a willingness to learn.

Any other advice for someone starting out?

Ask questions and network. AMWA Carolinas has many opportunities to meet others in the field, including alternating monthly networking lunches and dinners. At the networking lunch, you can meet and talk with the chapter president and other experienced medical writers. At the dinner, a discussion leader gives a short, informal presentation on a topic of interest, and questions are encouraged. The chapter is also launching a mentor program (see page 1), which will give writers who are starting out the chance to receive guidance and advice from an experienced medical writer.

2007 Carolinas Chapter Conference: Old Favorites, New Features

By Tracey Fine

The 2007 Carolinas conference was a pleasant mix of "tried and true" and some new features. On May 4, over 60 participants—a new record—from several states converged once again on the Friday Center in Chapel Hill for the annual event.

We kicked off the conference on May 3 with an afternoon historical tour of the University of North Carolina (UNC) campus at Chapel Hill. Out-of-staters and locals alike enjoyed a spring walk

through campus lead by long-time Chapel Hill residents Jenny Walker (also a UNC alumna) and Tracey Fine. Participants learned about UNC's long history through architecture, flora, art, and even the dead (ie, in the Old Chapel Hill Cemetery).

Following the tour, about 20 conference attendees and AMWA Carolinas members enjoyed dinner at Chapel Hill hotspot Top of the Hill.

This year's standard conference offerings included classes from AMWA core, editing/writing, and advanced curricula taught by veteran favorites. Howard Smith taught *Writing the Final Report of a Clinical Trial*. Bart Harvey pulled a double shift teaching *Statistics for Medical Writers* and *Understanding Sample Size and Study Power*. And, Mary Ann Foote came all the way from

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2007 Chapter Conference Recap, *continued from page 3*

California to present *Basics of Human Anatomy and Physiology*.

Open sessions were the big news this year. Following the lead of other AMWA chapters, the Carolinas chapter offered 2 open sessions covering 3 timely topics. Howard Smith led a session on evidence-based medicine. He guided participants through a critical analysis of a medical

journal article. Dana Randall helped us understand the basics of pharmacokinetics, and Edward Lobenhofer did the same with pharmacogenomics. The open sessions were well attended and enthusiastically received by conference participants. This new feature will soon be counted among our old favorites.

The Executive Committee endeavors to provide interesting,

educational, and entertaining chapter conferences each year. Planning for the 2008 conference will begin soon. If you would like to be involved, contact Carol Bader (twc9194692476@earthlink.net) or Ellen Stoltzfus (estoltzfus@nc.rr.com).

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program, please send an e-mail to Tara Hun-Dorris at tara@thdeditorial.com. Please provide your name, e-mail address, employer, type of medical writing you do, and geographic area (eg, if you are in Irmo, South Carolina, indicate "greater Columbia area" along with the actual city so it will be easier to match groups up). You will periodically receive via e-mail a list of AMWA members in your community who are interested in networking with other medical writers. After that, it's up to you!

Mentor Program

An association like this is all about outreach and networking. Every year, the president receives a lot of requests from medical writers/would-be medical writers for advice/information about specific aspects of medical writing, but the president is not always the best person to respond to these queries. Therefore, the chapter is establishing a mentor program.

The program is simple but does have a few basic guidelines. Mentors must be AMWA Carolinas chapter members in good standing; have a minimum of 2 years' experience in medical writing; be willing to provide 2 hours per month via phone, e-mail, or in-person meetings; and must be willing to respond to communications/questions from mentee within 1 week. Mentees must be AMWA Carolinas chapter members in good standing; understand that the mentor is only obligated to provide 2 hours/month of time; respect time constraints of mentor; and understand that this is not a job service or reference service; the mentor is only providing professional advice and guidance—NOT job placement.

The mentor/mentee period will be for 6 months after initial contact. Any contact after that period is at the discretion of both parties and not per AMWA Carolinas. AMWA Carolinas will provide e-mail contact information for matched mentor

and mentee. Any additional personal information provided is at the discretion of the parties. AMWA Carolinas will not pay for any meetings/expenses incurred in the mentoring process. Any advice or exchange of information is at the discretion of the parties involved and is not implicitly sanctioned by AMWA Carolinas. The chapter will match the mentor/mentee on the basis of interest and relevant experience. Mentors will be solicited via listserv, newsletter, and Website. Once the chapter has a pool of mentors, we will launch the program with a call for mentees on the listserv, the Web site, and the newsletter.

If you are interested in serving as a mentor to new medical writers or those interested in changing careers (eg, moving from regulatory to manuscripts), please e-mail me. (For those seeking mentors, please do not contact me just yet. We will send out an e-mail when the program is up and running.)

Member Survey Results

By Tara Hun-Dorris

Earlier this year, the AMWA Carolinas Chapter developed a membership survey. The goal was to determine what our membership wants to see in terms of programs, activities, and services at the regional level. The Executive Committee jointly developed the survey. It was distributed via the chapter listserv and also put in the packets of spring conference attendees who were Carolinas Chapter members.

Results

Overall, 26 members responded, representing about 10% of the total chapter membership. The majority of respondents had attended the chapter conference (77%) and planned to attend again (85%), making the annual May event the most popular chapter program by far. By contrast, much smaller numbers of participants had attended bimonthly chapter dinners (31%) and lunches (19%), chapter meetings (31%), and chapter outings (23%). However, in all cases, >50% of respondents indicated an interest in attending these events in the future. We asked respondents what topics for future meetings interested them. The majority of respondents expressed an interest in listening to a noted speaker (69%), learning more about a specific medical topic (58%), and learning how to improve editorial skills (50%). Surprisingly, freelancing and improving job search strategies—topics the chapter has focused on in the past—were less popular, with 38% and 19% of respondents expressing interest, respectively. We also asked respondents about their

preferred location for chapter events (eg, Raleigh, Durham, Chapel Hill, Cary, other, and specific areas within each city). Unfortunately, the responses were as diverse as the geographic area we cover, with no general consensus. Despite this, 96% of respondents indicated they plan to attend a chapter event in this year.

We also wanted to know about the newsletter. Quite frankly, we put a lot of time and resources into it and weren't sure anyone was actually reading it. Eighty-five percent of respondents indicate they do read the newsletter, and all respondents indicated they wanted to read it quarterly (35%), monthly (27%), or bimonthly (23%).

Action

The chapter will continue to publish this newsletter 3 to 4 times per year, and reader input and contributions are always welcome. Respondents also indicated overwhelmingly that they would like to see open sessions or non-credit workshops at the chapter conference, and the chapter plans to continue to deliver on that, especially after the success of this year's open sessions.

A few survey respondents wanted to know how the chapter could better reach out to members beyond RTP. Unfortunately, we don't have the financial or volunteer resources for "mobile" meetings at this time, but the chapter does plan to post "connection" information to the Web site and listserv, providing a means for AMWA Carolinas members in other areas to network amongst

themselves. Regarding the location of chapter programs, the Executive Committee feels we have a good mix right now, with the annual conference in Chapel Hill, bimonthly lunches moving to North Raleigh, and bimonthly dinners and chapter meetings in Cary/Durham, thereby encompassing the 4 major cities in the Triangle.

Limitations

As with any research, this survey does have limitations. The questions were developed by the Executive Committee based on our experience and curiosity. We did not collect any demographic information about respondents. We also failed to obtain information about use of our Web site and listserv.

Because we had such a low response when the survey was initially sent out via the listserv, we put it in the packets at our spring conference. It is possible that by receiving results from members already attending a chapter event our results are biased in favor of a segment of the membership who tends to be more active (100% of respondents said they plan to renew their membership). Also, in the interest of time and mathematical accuracy, the percentages reported above are of the total (N) number of respondents, not the number of respondents who answered a given question (n).

Despite these limitations, the survey was a wonderful tool that provided valuable information about the future direction of the chapter.

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About the Carolinas Chapter

President: [Tara Hun-Dorris, MMC, ELS](#)

President-elect: [Carol Bader, MS](#)

Immediate past president: [Jennifer King, PhD, ELS](#)

Secretary: [Ellen Stoltzfus, PhD](#)

Treasurer: [Tracey Fine, MS, ELS](#)

Listserv Manager: [Diane Feldman](#)

Newsletter editor, Web boss: [Pat French](#)