



## Carolinas Chapter Launches Web Site

<http://www.amwacarolinas.org>—that’s the URL to remember and bookmark to find out the latest information about AMWA’s Carolinas Chapter. The Web site, which was launched earlier this month, was produced and is maintained by AMWA member Pat French.

It features information about the chapter and the national organization; a calendar of events; job information; current and past issues of this newsletter; chapter contact information; and links to related organizations, writing and editing resources, and medical resources. In short, it’s a great locally produced tool for chapter AMWA members. It’s also a great resource for people who are considering joining AMWA but want more information about local activities. Be sure to check out the Web site soon and watch it for news about upcoming conference activities.

<http://www.amwacarolinas.org>

## Mark Your Calendars

### 2004 chapter conference date and seminars selected

The Carolinas Chapter 2004 conference has been scheduled for Friday, May 7. The following core curriculum workshops will be offered:

- English Usage and Abusage (R), taught by Edie Schwager
- Investigational New Drug Applications (PH), taught by Howard Smith
- Ethics of Authorship and Editorship (EW/PH), taught by Carolina’s Chapter member Nancy Taylor

The following advanced curriculum workshop will also be offered:

- Rhetorical Grammar, taught by Nancy Taylor

The conference will again be held at the Friday Center in Chapel Hill (<http://www.fridaycenter.unc.edu/fc/fcdir.htm>). More details will follow in future issues of this newsletter and on the chapter’s Web site. Below, please find descriptions of each of the courses.

See “chapter conference” continued on page 6

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# Carolina Chapter Members Take Miami by Storm

## 2003 national conference highlights

With Hurricane Isabel bearing down on the Mid-South coastline, 28 Carolinas Chapter AMWA members fled in advance of the rain and wind to enjoy the sunshine and calm blue waters of Miami. But our members did more than enjoy the tropical weather. Seven members lead workshops, breakfast roundtables, or exercise classes (see President's Message, page 3). Other members busied themselves taking core and advanced curriculum workshops; networking; exploring the exhibit hall; splashing about in AMWA-coordinated water aerobics; and attending seminars, breakfast roundtables, luncheons, dinners, and, yes, receptions (see photos).

The conference even featured speakers who hailed from Durham, North Carolina. Joe and Terry Graedon, of National Public Radio's *People's Pharmacy* fame, gave a thought-provoking presentation, *Communicating about controversies: Distinguishing experts and visionaries from kooks*. In their classic style so well known to NPR listeners, the Graedons touched on everything from Judah Folkman and angiogenesis to fish oil to the Atkins diet and hormone replacement therapy.

The keynote address was given by Robert N. Butler, M.D., who discussed the wonderful world of longevity. Another interesting open session featured real-life CSIs Joseph H. Davis, M.D., the retired Miami-Dade medical examiner, and an academic counterpart, Anthony B. Falsetti, Ph.D., from the University of Florida in Gainesville. The pair discussed the basic principles of forensic science and applied them to the tragic case of Ron Brown, who they concluded died of injuries sustained in an airplane crash, not of a gun-shot wound before the crash, as conspiracy theorists contend.

Overall, almost 800 people attended this year's conference. The conference was improved in that there were many more open sessions compared to previous years. Topics included everything from how to become an AMWA presenter to differences between clinical and statistical significance and navigating National Library of Medicine databases.

The whole conference had a professional feel, despite the casual Miami atmosphere. There were more corporate sponsors, and receptions and networking events were very well attended.

REPORT COMPILED BY TRACEY FINE, TARA HUN, JENNIFER KING, AND TRISH LONG



Terry Graedon chats with Pat French at the Carolinas Chapter reception.



Lizzy McGuffey, Tracey Fine, and Dana Randall enjoy the conference.

# President's Message: Your Involvement Improves Chapter

BY TERRY PAUL

A few years ago when I was employed as a medical writer in the pharmaceutical industry, AMWA played a pivotal role in my development and education as a writer. I took several workshops while attending local and national conferences to hone my skills and embrace new ones.

However, I was not part of AMWA. I was not involved with the organization at any level.

Today, as a freelance medical writer, I am involved in AMWA because I want to help our local chapter, have a say in the services our chapter provides, and develop networking opportunities at the local and national levels.

Time is a valuable commodity to most of us. Finding the time to do some of the things we want to do in life can be challenging given today's busy schedules. The success of the Carolina's Chapter of AMWA relies on the time its members can devote to the organization. A commitment of a little time can be rewarding for you and for our other members.

One example of how you can contribute to the chapter is by considering writing an article for this newsletter on a topic of interest to our members. Beginning with the fall newsletter, all chapter newsletters will be forwarded to the editor of AMWA's national journal and, if deemed of significant interest to headquarters, a regional

article may be selected for publication in the national journal. We will also be submitting individual articles of interest to headquarters so that a repository of articles can be included on the national Web site. In addition, AMWA will be presenting an award for the best chapter newsletter article (see page 6). If you'd like to contribute to the newsletter, please contact our newsletter editor, Tara Hun, by sending an e-mail to tara.hun@i3research.com or by calling 919-678-4590.

Our newsletter and other chapter information will also be accessible to members, both locally and nationally from our recently launched Web site (see page 1).

I'd also like to take this opportunity to acknowledge and thank the following chapter members who volunteered their time and talents at the annual conference in Miami: Peggy Boe, Kerri Farrelly, Jennifer King, Karen Klein, Sandra Manheimer, Nancy D. Taylor, and Rebecca Teaff.

I am looking forward to a successful and rewarding year for the chapter and welcome your ideas and suggestions for improving the chapter. Please do not hesitate to contact me at 919-847-5659 or by sending an e-mail to paulmedwriting@mindspring.com.

## About the AMWA Carolinas Chapter

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## Meet the 2004 Executive Committee

The 2004 Executive Committee is excited to be working together for the betterment of the Carolinas Chapter. Please contact any of us with questions, concerns, thoughts, or ideas. (Contact information can be found on page 3 and on the chapter's Web site.) Following is a list and a little information about the 2004 Executive Committee.

*President, Terry Paul:* After obtaining a B.S. in applied biology from Brunel University in England in 1983, Terry obtained his doctorate in infectious disease from the University of Aston, also in England, in 1988. He left England in 1989 to become a research associate in the Department of Microbiology at the University of Guelph in Canada, then at the Department of Microbiology and Immunology at the UNC School of Medicine in 1994. Throughout his career, Terry has authored more than 16 manuscripts and review articles. In 1999, Terry joined Glaxo Wellcome (now GlaxoSmithKline) as a medical writer. Between 1999 and 2002, he wrote manuscripts, review articles, clinical study reports, and integrated summaries of safety and efficacy. In 2002, Terry became a freelance medical writer.

*President Elect, Jenny Walker:* Jenny is a clinical research professional and medical librarian. She is employed as a clinical research communications specialist III with the communications department at the Duke Clinical Research Institute (DCRI). She works as a medical writer, primarily preparing study-specific material for research sites involved in clinical trials administered by DCRI. She has 15 years experience as a health sciences librarian at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst and as director of a medical library at Durham Regional Hospital. Jenny has a master's degree in library science, with a concentration in academic medical librarianship from the State University of New York at Albany, a bachelor's degree in journalism from the UNC-Chapel Hill, and an associate's degree in clinical trials research from Durham Technical Community College.

*Secretary, Carol Bader:* Carol manages the medical writing department for i3 Research, formerly Ingenix. Carol is primarily responsible for oversee-

ing protocol development and production of clinical study reports. She has an M.S. in zoology from the University of Maryland in College Park and a B.S. in biology from the UNC-Chapel Hill. Carol has also earned AMWA's core curriculum pharmaceutical certification. Prior to joining i3 Research, Carol spent several years in medical publishing, where she edited publications in a variety of areas, including allied health, internal medicine, and orthopedics.

*Treasurer, Michelle Bean:* Michelle is a registered dietician for the Women's Health Initiative. Previously, she worked in the research unit at UNC hospitals. After earning a B.S. in human nutrition and dietetics and completing an internship at Barnes, Jewish, Christian in St. Louis, Michelle came to North Carolina to complete a master's of public health in nutrition.

*Program Chair, Tracey Fine:* Tracey is the president and principal writer at Fine Biomedical Publications, Inc. (FBP), which handles a variety of publications, including clinical trial-based manuscripts, review articles, continuing medical education, medical congress materials, clinical study reports, and patient information. Tracey has written for pharmaceutical companies, CROs, governmental non-profit public health agencies, and academia. Tracey has a master's degree in biology from Southern Illinois University, AMWA's medical writing and editing certificate, and Editor in the Life Sciences certification.

*Newsletter Editor, Tara Hun:* As a senior medical writer at i3 Research (formerly Ingenix), Tara writes and edits regulatory and medical education documents. Before joining i3 Research, Tara was first a staff writer then an associate editor at a water quality organization and later a communications director for two North Carolina-based non-profit organizations. Tara has a B.S. in journalism from West Virginia University in Morgantown and a master's in mass communications from the University of South Carolina in Columbia. Tara has also completed AMWA's core curriculum pharmaceutical certification.

# Editor's Note

BY TARA HUN

Television, print media, snail mail, e-mail, spam, the Internet, verbal communication.... We are inundated with news and information about every topic imaginable, from those we care passionately about (e.g., information to help protect the health and well-being of our families) to those pertinent to our careers (e.g., the AMWA salary survey) to those we could do without (e.g., spam promising to remove unwanted hair in 14 days). In short, it's the age of information overload. So, as the editor of yet another source of information, my goal for this newsletter is for it to be a valuable resource for the very busy medical writer.

I started to think about what I could do to make this a great tool, but then realized my approach was all wrong. What I need to do is ask you what would you like to see in each issue?

In my short tenure (this is my first issue), I've already come to realize that our chapter is diverse in terms of what we do and the education and experiences that have led us all to a common interest/career in medical writing. So drop me an e-mail (tara.hun@i3research.com), and let me know what you'd like to see in this newsletter. If there's a topic you want to know more about, I'll almost guarantee there's a Carolinas Chapter member who can offer some insight. Similarly, consider writing an article for this newsletter. By sharing our experiences, we can all grow.

## Just the Facts

### Broadcast medical journalism requires brevity, accuracy

BY TRACEY FINE

For the chapter's third quarter meeting, Tom Linden, director of the Medical Journalism Program at UNC-Chapel Hill and administrator of one of the nation's first master's degree programs in medical journalism, presented on writing for broadcast.

Linden's message was brief: fewer words are used with moving pictures, so a writer must be able to summarize. For example, a 90-second broadcast can be summarized in as little as six words.

According to Linden, the basic format for writing for broadcast is: preview the story, tell the story, and recap the story.

Recapping or repetition is important, Linden emphasized, because people may tune in at different points throughout the broadcast.

Case histories are an important feature of broadcast medical journalism because they add drama, which is a staple of broadcast journalism, Linden noted. For example, every story needs one primary problem, each problem needs a solution, and each solution needs a face.

Linden illustrated these points by showing a short video about clinical depression that was produced by master's level students. The effective and moving piece told the story of a campus minister who was successfully treated for clinical depression.

Anyone interested in obtaining more information about UNC's medical journalism program can visit the Web site [www.jomc.unc.edu/medicaljournalism](http://www.jomc.unc.edu/medicaljournalism). Linden also recommended the following reading materials:

- *A Field Guide for Science Writers*, Deborah Blum and Mary Knudson, editors
- *News & Numbers: A Guide to Reporting Statistical Claims and Controversies in Health and Other Fields*, by Victor Cohn and Lewis Cope
- *Medical Journalism: Exposing Fact, Fiction, Fraud*, by Ragnar Levi
- *The Medusa and the Snail: More Notes of a Biology Watcher*, by Lewis Thomas

*English Usage and Abusage* is a lively, interactive course that covers American English usage with the aim of stimulating beginning, moderately experienced, and seasoned but jaded writers and editors. Using a study aid, "Word Aerobics," participants will engage in a freewheeling discussion of common (and not so common) errors in usage and decide how to remedy them.

*Investigational New Drug Applications* is designed for writers and editors with little or no experience in preparing documents for regulatory applications. This course covers the essential components of an NDA, applicable FDA regulations, and the reviewer's needs. It also identifies the writer's contribution to the quality of an application. The course includes a brief survey of electronic submission requirements and available online sources.

*Ethics of Authorship and Editorship* is for novices and moderately experienced writers and editors and examines ethical issues in scientific publications. Participants will discuss using ethical standards, highlighting controversial and unresolved issues. Author's editors, journal editors, and writers in the pharmaceutical industry often have conflicting perspectives on authorship, duplicate publication, conflict of interest, and peer review; these perspectives will be examined.

*Rhetorical Grammar* is for writers and editors who have taken Basic Grammar or Advanced Grammar and Sentence Structure and Patterns workshop. Participants will examine the effects on readers of writers' and editors' choices about sentence structure and word order, that is the rhetorical effects of grammar. The goal will be to focus on the reader-centered rather than the writer-centered prose.

## AMWA to Award Best Chapter Newsletter Article

BY TRACEY FINE

This new award was established to increase the visibility of articles published in chapter newsletters or on Web sites that may be of interest to other chapters, recognize writers who submit these articles, and encourage the publication of useful content at the chapter level.

Following are the proposed submission criteria:

- The competition is only open to AMWA members.
- The entry must be an original article published in a chapter newsletter or on a chapter Web site during the previous calendar year (e.g., the 2004 award would recognize a 2003 article).
- Articles must be related to some aspect of medical writing. Examples include improving writing or editing skills, publishing technology, career management, medical or scientific topics, or profiles of members and their work.
- Entries must be received by February 1, 2004.
- Four copies of each entry are required, either in the newsletter or as a printed copy of the Web site page.

**Mail entries to:**  
Chapter Articles Award  
AMWA  
40 West Gude Drive, Suite 101  
Rockville, MD 20850-1192  
Telephone: 301-294-5303

Entries will be judged by a joint committee selected by the Administrator of Chapters and the Administrator of Awards. The judges' decision will be final.

The award will be announced in the *AMWA Journal* and on the AMWA Web site. The winning article will be published in the journal. The winner will also receive either one credit or non-credit workshop at the annual conference following the award or *AMWA Essays for Biomedical Communicators, Volumes 1 and 2*.

## THE WRITER'S FORUM: Can We Recession-proof Our Careers?

Following are some responses to the last issue's forum question:

- Get a writing job if you are a freelancer. It may sound counter-intuitive, but a full- or part-time job can be a means of financial stability. Also, broaden your writing skills and knowledge base into new fields of writing so that you can enter new markets. For example, take AMWA courses on new topics. Broaden your client base by networking and advertising your services. Consider lowering your rates in order to retain your clients, who may have tighter than normal budgets. Ask your clients if more work will be forthcoming, so you can begin to prepare for it. —Terry Paul
- Try to do the best that you can always because you never know who is watching or evaluating you. Also, stay curious about what is going on at various companies. What kinds of people are they hiring? What do the jobs entail? —Jennifer King
- When the telecommunications company I was working for started laying off employees, I started doing more outside of my job so that it was not my only professional focus. If the job was going to disappear, I didn't want to be caught unprepared. I began to prepare not only for getting laid off but also for changing careers. I rejoined AMWA and started taking courses toward certification. This gave me a focus. I attended meetings and asked everyone I met about their job, whether they liked it, how they obtained it, etc. I looked hard at the AMWA job sheet, particularly telecommuting positions and started checking the Sunday want-ads to learn the names of companies who did the work I was interested in. I noted how often jobs reappeared, did lots of Web searches, and checked on other organizations for people interested in medical writing and editing. I networked continuously and gave some thought to going back to school, but decided I wasn't ready to pick another degree. I also began volunteering at the Ronald McDonald House and eventually did a little writing and editing for their executive director and then their newsletter, which I really enjoyed. I also picked up some other editing that was occasionally medically related. By the time I actually did get laid off, I was eager to move into medical work whole-hog, and I had a fairly good idea about the lay of the land. VERY IMPORTANT: I knew beforehand that if I did get laid off, I would likely get a very generous severance package, and that makes a tremendous difference. —Vivian McGee
- Think beyond your current skill set. What is compatible with what you currently do? For example, as a writer, take some editing or desktop publishing courses. Learn Web site development. These may not be what you want to do as a career, but these extra skills may make the difference between paying the bills and continuing to do some of what you love during these tough times. Also, if you primarily work in medicine, consider familiarizing yourself with other areas. If possible, find a niche, one topic that you write/edit so specifically and that few other people can do so that you stay marketable.—Tara Hun

### Next issue: Is the Trend Toward Political Correctness Resulting in Sloppy Writing?

In an essay chapter member Patricia Watson originally wrote for the BELS listserve she states, "I have heard some editors comment that 'correct grammar' is becoming politically incorrect, and worse, that editors may become completely superfluous because of this trend." Send me your thoughts on this topic ([tara.hun@i3research.com](mailto:tara.hun@i3research.com)), and be sure to read the next issue to find out what Patricia had to say about this trend as well.

# THE BACK PAGE

## What makes a good medical writer?

BY TARA HUN

As the leading organization that supports medical writers, I turned to AMWA first to define a good medical writer. AMWA's code of ethics, <http://www.amwa.org/about/ethics.html>, sums it up pretty well. According to the code, medical writers should:

- Observe regulations relevant to the materials they produce.
- Be accurate and objective.
- Try to prevent dissemination of incorrect information and not take assignments when they lack the skills and experience for those jobs.
- Always be ethical.
- Strive to expand their knowledge and perfect their skills.
- Respect confidences.

### EXPERIENCE: THAT MAGICAL 10-LETTER WORD SAYS IT ALL.

- Expect fair compensation for and acknowledgement of their services.
- Always be professional.

In addition, Terry Paul, a successful freelancer, notes that good medical writers plan their work to fit their lives (not the opposite), are good time managers, manage multiple projects appropriately to minimize conflict and stress, work efficiently, and are flexible.

The Delaware Valley Chapter publishes a toolkit for new medical writers on its Web site ([www.amwa-dvc.org/toolkit/index.shtml](http://www.amwa-dvc.org/toolkit/index.shtml)). The toolkit identifies the characteristics of good medical writing as "thorough research, accuracy, logical organization, clear thinking and writing, and readability."

But what do employers or clients see as an indicator of a good medical writer? Yes, some want "deadline driven" people who pay "attention to detail," have "good communication skills," and are "accurate." However, a quick and decidedly non-scientific scan of AMWA's job listings suggests that employers/clients are looking for one thing above all others, and it's something that, unfortunately, medical writers have very little control over, at least in the short term: EXPERIENCE. That magical 10-letter word says it all. Though the amount of experience varies with the job, it seems that all employers/clients are looking for experienced writers.

Of course, for new writers, there's always the chicken-and-egg conundrum of "How do I get experience if no one will hire me, and no one wants to hire me because I don't have any experience."

To those would-be writers, I suggest enrolling in the AMWA Core Curriculum and taking advantage of other educational opportunities. Try incorporating writing/editing into your current job—almost every professional job involves some degree of those skills. If you're still in college, take some medical writing or technical communication classes if your major is science, and some science

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classes if your major is writing. Consider doing some pro-bono article writing or volunteer work with a health-related non-profit organization. The objective is to demonstrate two things: (1) that you can write; and (2) that you understand the science behind the paragraph. Byron J. Bailey of the University of Texas Medical Branch in Galveston posts an online presentation for medical communicators aptly titled “How you can communicate better.” His three key factors for effective communication are:

1. Know the subject
2. Know the subject
3. Know the subject

It may seem obvious, but it is difficult to communicate without understanding.

It seems like some medical writers come into the field with a solid medical or scientific background. They generally know the subject inside-out but may struggle initially with communication aspects, everything from explaining scientific concepts at the lay level, organizing the presentation of information, and presenting it using proper grammar and syntax. The rest of us come from English or journalism backgrounds, and we are often prolific writers who can diagram the heck out of a sentence but in the beginning probably couldn't diagram a cellular structure any more complex than H<sub>2</sub>O. Many of us have never delved beyond a basic college-level biology or chemistry class.

The great thing about medical writing is that people from different backgrounds seem to excel in this profession. Medical and scientific types learn more effective communication strategies, and writers gain a better understanding of science and medicine. The key is knowing our weak areas and striving to improve them.

So, in short, medical writers can start out with a basic science or communications background and maintain high ethical standards while adding experience to the mix. Perhaps that is the key to successful medical writing. Though, there may also be an intangible something else that determines success. As the director of our Scientific and Medical Affairs Department has said, “good medical writers aren't made, they're born.”

## The History of AMWA's Core Curriculum

BY TRACEY FINE

At the chapter's second-quarter meeting, Lottie Applewhite, international author's editor and recipient of AMWA's highest honor, the Harold Swanberg Distinguished Service Award, gave an historical account of how she and former AMWA President (the late) Jerry McKee developed AMWA's core curriculum in the 1970s.

According to Lottie, at first the task seemed insurmountable. However, after several meetings she and Jerry had ideas for the first four required 3-hour workshops: an overview of biomedical communication, the medical communication team, proper English usage, and library usage. They also decided that members would complete four courses in their specialty. Similar to the current curriculum, these included writing/editing, pharmaceutical communication, freelancing, public relations, and audiovisual communication. Selecting courses was relatively easy compared with the arduous task of developing course outlines and finding qualified facilitators. After much research and planning, at the 1979 annual meeting in Kansas City, the Core Curriculum was inaugurated. By the 1981 conference in Toronto, it was fully implemented. Since then the curriculum has grown and evolved to keep up with science and technology, and the advanced curriculum has been developed.