



CAROLINA CONNECTIONS

Carolinas Chapter—American Medical Writers Association

March 2008

Carolinas Chapter Hosts Dr. Oliver Smithies

By Jenny Walker

The AMWA Carolinas Chapter is proud to host a lecture by Dr. Oliver Smithies, co-winner of the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine for 2007.

Dr. Smithies and his colleagues Dr. Mario R. Capecchi and Dr. Martin J. Evans were awarded the prize for their discoveries concerning embryonic stem cells and DNA recombination in mammals, which led to the ability to target genes in mice. Gene targeting allows scientists to produce almost any type of DNA modification in the mouse genome, making it possible to establish the role of individual

genes in health and disease. The work of Drs. Capecchi, Evans, and Smithies will help us to understand gene function in human development, affecting all fields of biomedicine and ultimately benefiting humankind. Dr. Smithies has used gene targeting to develop mouse models for diseases such as cystic fibrosis, thalassemia, hypertension, and atherosclerosis.

This exciting event is being held on March 6, 2008, in the Redbud Room at the Friday Center for Continuing Education, located at 100 Friday Center Drive, just off Highway

54 East, in Chapel Hill. There will be a reception at 6:00 pm, and Dr. Smithies' talk will begin promptly at 6:30 pm.

There is no charge for this event, but it is important that you preregister by contacting the event organizer, Jenny Walker, at jenny.walker@duke.edu or 919-668-5929.

For further information, contact Jenny. For directions to the Friday Center, go to www.fridaycenter.unc.edu.

Monthly News Alerts to Replace Quarterly Newsletter

By Deana Betterton-Lewis

Starting in March 2008, the Carolinas Chapter will begin sending out monthly news alerts in lieu of the quarterly newsletter. This change is being made to deliver relevant information to our members in a more timely manner.

The monthly news alerts will provide details on upcoming AMWA events as well as newsworthy items affecting chapter members.

To ensure that you receive the monthly news alerts, make sure that you are subscribed to the chapter listserv. To join the listserv, send email to amwa_carowner@yahoogroups.com. The monthly news alerts will also be available from the chapter website.

To suggest ideas for the news alerts or to submit an item to be included, send email to dbettert@yahoo.com.

In This Issue

| | |
|---|---|
| Carolinas Chapter Hosts Dr. Oliver Smithies | 1 |
| Monthly News Alerts to Replace Quarterly Newsletter | 1 |
| Carolinas Chapter Spring Conference | 2 |
| BELS Exam at the Spring Conference | 2 |
| Chapter Executive Committee Members | 3 |
| Getting Started in Medical Writing | 4 |
| Upcoming Events | 6 |

Carolinas Chapter Spring Conference

By Carol Bader

The Carolinas Chapter Spring Conference will be held on Friday, May 2, 2008, at the Friday Center in Chapel Hill, NC. We have many exciting opportunities this year with 4 workshops and 3 open sessions. In addition, the BELS exam will be offered for those who register through the Board of Editors in the Life Sciences.

Four workshops will be offered:

- Sentence Structure and Patterns (EW): Susan Aiello, DVM, ELS

- Building a New Drug Application (PH): Howard Smith, MA
- Proofreading (EW): Susan Aiello, DVM, ELS
- Synergy of Style, Substance and Audience (ADV): R. Elliott Churchill, MA, MA

In addition, we are offering 3 open sessions:

- MEDLINE Searching and Introduction to Reference Manager: Jenny Walker, MLS and Deana Betterton-Lewis, BA

- Economic and Quality of Life Measures in Clinical Trials (Panel Discussion): Linda Davidson-Ray, MA; Kevin Anstrom, PhD; and Nancy Clapp-Channing, MPH
- Consequences of Citations: Kelly Horn, PhD, MS, ELS

Please visit the chapter website (<http://www.amwacarolinas.org>) to download the registration form and obtain additional information.

BELS Exam at the Spring Conference

By Diane Feldman

We are happy to announce that the AMWA Carolinas Spring Conference will host a testing session for certification by the Board of Editors in the Life Sciences (BELS exam) on Friday, May 2, 2008, at 9:00 am.

BELS was established to evaluate the proficiency of manuscript editors in the life sciences with the goal of certifying professional credibility. Editors who successfully complete the certification examination may use the designation ELS (Editor in the Life Sciences) after their names.

The BELS exam is a 3-hour multiple-choice test that resembles the standard tests used in many professions to certify practitioners. Written by senior life-science editors assisted by testing experts, the

exam focuses on the principles and practices of scientific editing.

Eligibility to take the exam requires a bachelor's degree and at least 2 years of experience as a manuscript editor in the life sciences. However, membership in BELS is not limited to those with a degree or editorial experience in the life sciences. Editors with academic backgrounds in many subjects have passed the BELS exam. Experience editing material published in journals, newsletters, textbooks, or reference books in any scientific or related field gives also you a reasonable chance of earning certification.

If you want to take the exam at the Spring Conference, **APPLY NOW**. The registration process takes time.

1. Submit a completed application, 3 letters from employers or clients describing and verifying your employment, your curriculum vitae, and documentation of your education.
2. You will receive a registration form and a study guide.
3. Submit the registration form and fee at least 3 weeks before the scheduled exam date.

For details about the exam or application process, visit the BELS website at <http://www.bels.org/index.htm>

Chapter Executive Committee Members for 2007-2008

Brief biosketches are provided for the AMWA Carolinas Chapter Executive Committee members for 2007-2008 as well as the 3 non-officer positions. The new roles took effect on October 13, 2007, at the close of the national conference.

Carol Bader (President): As a senior medical writer at Schwarz Biosciences, Carol is primarily responsible for writing clinical submissions documents and has written numerous protocols, clinical trial reports, and other clinical regulatory documents. Her medical writing experience spans a number of therapeutic areas, including Alzheimer's disease, chronic pain disorders, diabetes mellitus, and respiratory disorders. Prior to becoming a medical writer, Carol spent several years in medical publishing, where she edited publications in a variety of areas. Carol has a BS in biology from the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill and an MS in zoology from the University of Maryland, College Park. She also has AMWA's pharmaceutical and editing/writing certificates as well as the advanced certificate.

Ellen Stoltzfus (President-elect): Ellen is a senior medical writer with JK Associates, Inc., a medical communications company. Ellen has a PhD in experimental psychology from Duke University, and was a professor of psychology and neuroscience before becoming a medical writer. Her medical writing experience includes

regulatory documents, grants, continuing medical education, patient education, and manuscripts.

Tara Hun-Dorris (Immediate Past President): Tara has over 10 years of scientific/medical writing and editing experience. She is the owner of THD Editorial, Inc., a small but growing company that provides comprehensive medical writing services. Tara has extensive continuing medical education, regulatory, and commercial writing experience. Key indication experience includes but is not limited to asthma and allergic disease, vaccines, oncology, and infectious disease. Tara has a master's degree in mass communications from the University of South Carolina and a bachelor's degree in journalism from West Virginia University. She is a board-certified editor in the life sciences. She has also earned the American Medical Writers Association's (AMWA) pharmaceutical curriculum certificate.

Susan D'Alessandro (Secretary): As a senior medical writer at PPD, a global contract research organization, Susan writes mostly clinical study protocols and clinical study reports. Previous work in the pharmaceutical industry includes pharmacology research, clinical research, and project management. While working for the New York State Health Department, Susan wrote and edited HIV/AIDS treatment guidelines, training materials for

HIV healthcare workers, and reports on AIDS and cancer epidemiology. Susan has a BA in biology-chemistry from Skidmore College and an MS in epidemiology from the State University of New York at Albany. She has earned AMWA's pharmaceutical and editing/writing certificates.

Tracey Fine (Treasurer): Tracey's career in medical writing began over 12 years ago at a non-profit public health agency where she wrote patient information materials on sexually transmitted diseases. She then moved into clinical research writing, first at a contract research organization and then at GlaxoSmithKline (GSK). Tracey left GSK in 2002 to launch her freelance business Fine Biomedical Publications, Inc. Over the years, Ms. Fine has served the Carolinas chapter in a variety of roles, including president and chapter event coordinator. Additionally, she has served as chairperson of the Eric Martin Award, member of the publication committee, and peer reviewer for the *AMWA Journal*. She is the current editor of the Chapter Corner Section of the *AMWA Journal*. Tracey holds a BA and an MS in biology. She has completed 3 AMWA certificate programs, including writing/editing, freelance, and advanced. Additionally, Tracey is a board-certified Editor in the Life Sciences.

Continued on page 5

Getting Started in Medical Writing: Experiences of AMWA Members

Our series of “getting started” articles continues with the experience of Pat French, principal medical writer/editor of Left Lane Communications.

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

Technically, I began my career in health-related communications as a hospital dietary aide in upstate New York when I was 15 years old. In those days, before computerized medical records were in use, we had to double-check the doctors’ orders against the patients’ menu selections daily for every meal, to make sure that patients had not asked for something that they were not supposed to have. We then had to write reports of the discrepancies, which, as you might expect, were frequent.

The first “real” medical writing I did was when I was the manager of an internist’s office in New Jersey. In addition to reporting vital signs, lab results, etc. in the patients’ charts, I quite often had to write summaries of their conditions and care for their insurance companies, to get their claims paid (we hoped). That experience was very useful when I later became the administrator of a health claims department of a Massachusetts insurance company, and I needed to write summaries justifying payment of thousands of dollars in medical bills. It was interesting being on the other side.

The husband of my best friend at the insurance company happened to be the medical director of a nearby pharmaceutical company.

One day, she mentioned that he needed help with “some documents” and asked whether I was interested in talking to him about the position. Before I knew what I had gotten myself into, I was writing the Nonclinical Pharmacology/ Toxicology; Chemistry, Manufacturing, and Controls; and Microbiology sections of a New Drug Application! It was definitely one of those situations where when you don’t *know* that it’s impossible, then you just go ahead and do it. Again, this was in the pre-computer days, so we’re talking about generating roomfuls of paper. What’s probably more unusual is that I didn’t have a degree at the time; that came later.

After getting a BS in biology, I moved to North Carolina to work in the Communications group of the Duke Clinical Research Institute. To this day, I don’t know how I ended up being considered for the job. I had applied for a data analyst position, and somehow my resume ended up on my soon-to-be director’s desk. I was a contractor for the first 2 years, and then a full-time writer, editor, and manager for the next 10 years.

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

I’m the owner of Left Lane Communications, which provides writing and editing services to the pharmaceutical and device industries, medical communications companies, nonprofit organizations, meeting

planners, and individual researchers around the world. My “bread and butter” therapeutic areas are cardiology and infectious disease, but I’ve worked on projects covering everything from obstetrical complications in Ethiopia to the use of Botox for migraines. That’s one of the things I like best about what I do—I get to learn about all sorts of things.

Certain skills are needed to be a good medical writer, and different skills are needed to be a good businessperson. For the former, I’d say that attention to detail, an ability to find information quickly, people skills, and a firm grasp of grammar and usage are probably the most important. Curiosity never hurts. To succeed as a businessperson, it’s critical to think of yourself not as a freelance, but *as a business*. I see so many self-employed writers who do not think of themselves as running a business. Unfortunately, this often means that their clients don’t think they’re dealing with a business, either, leading to late payments, poor communications, and other difficulties.

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

I’d look for evidence of a good work ethic, customer service skills, and curiosity.

Continued on page 5

Getting Started in Medical Writing: Experiences of AMWA Members *(Continued from page 4)*

Any other advice for someone starting out?

Join every relevant email listserv, RSS feed, and Internet bulletin board you can find—they're free, and you'd be amazed what a small world it is. I once got a freelance project just because someone at a drug company liked the way I answered a question on

an email list. Here are just some of the ones I belong to: the AMWA Freelance and Editing-Writing listservs (of course); the ACESJobs, Freelance (publishing industry), FreelanceWritersandEditors, Medical_Writing, and PayingWriterJobs groups at Yahoo!; the Copyediting-L listserv; the ScienceJobs RSS

feed; and Emma Hitt's blog feed. Once you feel comfortable at these places, start taking part in the conversations. You never know when you're going to make a connection, and that's what you need to generate work and community.

Chapter Executive Committee Members for 2007-2008

(Continued from page 3)

Diane Feldman (Listserv Manager): Diane is the owner of AuthorCraft Editorial Services (www.authorcraft.net), a company that specializes in publications assistance for authors of scientific, technical, and business manuscripts. AuthorCraft services include all phases of editing, from substantive editing to proofreading, as well as publications consulting and writing workshops. Diane has been writing and editing professionally for over 20 years. Her extensive experience includes editing medical research manuscripts, scientific textbooks and reference books, health and science newsletters, software documentation, corporate procedures, and sales communications. She is both an active AMWA member and an Associate Fellow of the Society for Technical Communication.

Deana Betterton-Lewis (Newsletter Editor): Deana is a senior medical writer in Research Triangle Park, NC, where she writes publications as well as

regulatory documentation based on the results of clinical trials. She has written and edited manuscripts, review articles, abstracts, and textbook chapters about epilepsy, heart failure, hypertension, dyslipidemia, overactive bladder, and prostate cancer. Before transitioning to medical writing 5 years ago, Deana was a technical writer in the computer industry for 12 years. She earned her BA in psychology from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and expects to receive an MS degree in biomedical writing from the University of the Sciences in Philadelphia in August 2008. She is the newsletter editor for the Carolinas AMWA chapter and also writes and edits articles for the Professional Development section of the *AMWA Journal*.

Pat French (Web Boss): Pat is the principal medical writer and editor for her company, Left Lane Communications, which provides writing and editing services to the pharmaceutical and device industries, medical

communications companies, nonprofit organizations, meeting planners, and individual researchers around the world. Her particular expertise is in cardiology and infectious disease, but her experience encompasses numerous subject areas. Before starting Left Lane, Pat held various communications positions at the Duke Clinical Research Institute over her 12 years there. Her other previous experience includes: CRA for a multinational drug company, administrator of a medical insurance claims division, office manager for an internist, and instructor of medical assisting at a community college. Pat holds a BS in biology from Fitchburg State College (Massachusetts). Pat also is a member of the Council of Science Editors and the Freelancers Union.

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 [chapter website](#) for more details as more events are added.

| Date and Time | Description of Event and Location |
|---------------------|--|
| March 6 at 6:00 pm | Reception and lecture by Dr. Oliver Smithies, Nobel Laureate at the Friday Center in Chapel Hill |
| March 20 at 6:30 pm | OTC Readers Group: <i>Cold Comfort Farm</i> at B. Christopher's restaurant in Chapel Hill |
| April 3 at 6:30 pm | Bimonthly discussion dinner at NeoChina in Cary Topic: Microsoft Word for Medical and Technical Writers Speakers: Maxine Okazaki and Peter Aiken |
| May 2 | 2008 Carolinas Chapter Conference at the Friday Center in Chapel Hill |
| June 5 at 6:30 pm | Bimonthly discussion dinner at NeoChina in Cary Topic: FDA Requirements Speaker: Maria Oyaki |
| July 3 at 12:00 pm | Bimonthly networking lunch at Azitra restaurant in Raleigh |
| August 7 at 6:30 pm | Bimonthly discussion dinner at NeoChina in Cary Topic: Copyright Speaker: Jenny Walker |

Carolina Connections is published periodically by the Carolinas chapter of the American Medical Writers Association. © 2008 AMWA Carolinas and the individual authors. All rights reserved.

About the Carolinas Chapter

President: [Carol Bader, MS](#)
President-elect: [Ellen Stoltzfus, PhD](#)
Immediate Past President: [Tara Hun-Dorris, MMC, ELS](#)
Secretary: [Susan D'Alessandro, MS](#)
Treasurer: [Tracey Fine, MS, ELS](#)
Listserv Manager: [Diane Feldman](#)
Newsletter Editor: [Deana Betterton-Lewis](#)
Web boss: [Pat French](#)