



The AMWA Newsletter

American Medical Writers Association

November, 1970

Vol. 1, No. 6

MEMBERSHIP TOPS 1,900

The Association's membership rolls currently hold the names of 1,949 medical communicators.

Metropolitan New York is by far the largest chapter, with 612 members as of mid-September. Next in size is the Greater Chicago area, with 273 members; and Delaware Valley (Philadelphia), 171 members.

Closely grouped in size are the chapters encompassing Washington-Baltimore (115), Los Angeles (113) and Detroit (108).

Other active chapters and their memberships: North Central, 61; Southwestern, '77; Nebraska, 31; Mid-America, 54; and Northern California, 64.

The six proposed AMWA chapters and foreign nations are home for an additional 270 members.

NEW PUBLICATIONS AVAILABLE TO MEMBERS

Two publications, one on communication centers and the other on science writing, will soon be made available to members.

The **Directory of Communication Organizations**, is being offered to any AMWA member for only \$2.00, if paid in advance, otherwise the cost is \$7.50. Make check payable to Council of Communication Societies, Suite 514-16, 1545 Glenarm Place, Denver, Colorado 80202. The Directory is the first formal project completed by the Council, which was formed in 1969 with AMWA as a Charter member.

Your Future in Technical and Science Writing, written by Ralph Emerson Clarke, will be ready for publication in the Fall of '71.



Roger O. Egeberg, MD, at left, and AMWA President Eric W. Martin, PhD, at right.

Does a Health Care 'Crisis' Exist?

This was a question posed by the government's top physician, speaking at the recent annual meeting of AMWA in New York. A health care crisis does exist, Dr. Roger O. Egeberg answered himself, but the public does not truly understand it.

Communicators are to blame, at least in part, the tall, blunt-spoken physician-administrator declared. Following is an abstracted version of his remarks.

A great many people in this country are innocently unaware of a crisis in health care because those of us whose major preoccupation is communication-and I include myself in that category-have not done a very effective job of getting this message across. . . The majority of Americans have no idea what the phrase "health care crisis" is all about. They buy their health insurance. They see a doctor when they have to. They go to the hospital if he says so. They get better-most of them-and that's that. Until they become much better informed, there is little hope that

these flaws can be dealt with rationally and effectively. . . Rising public understanding of what medical science can achieve, an accomplishment for which journalism can take most of the credit, has created a demand for services that cannot be met. . . We now have to face the very critical question: Has the product been oversold? I don't mean in the sense of overrated. . . I mean oversold in the sense that the supply of health resources cannot keep up with demand, at least not under the present circumstances. I'm afraid the answer to that question is yes. And what happens when supply cannot keep up with demand? Well, among other things, the cost of the
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THOUGHTS FROM MEDICAL WRITERS

Lipomatosis Verbalis-

Its Cause and Cure

(presented by Leslie L. Lewis, Chicago)

In 1927, during my first job as a medical editor, my chief, the late Dr. Hoyt E. Dearholt, said to me: "You'll often hear it said that doctors are worse writers than anybody. Don't you believe it. There's good and there's bad, and what's bad is usually the result of hurrying to get the paper off to the publisher so as to get on to the next case. . . ." Forty-odd years and many hundreds of manuscripts later, I see no reason to dispute Dr. Dearholt's comment. . . There was some justification for the statement, several years ago, that "the common level of medical writing constitutes the most serious internal limitation to medical education and research." My thesis, however, is that this level is higher today than it was 20 years ago, and that it can be raised even higher, not by publishing long lists of totems and tabus for writers, but by encouraging the physician writer to avoid burying his thoughts in an impenetrable thicket of words. As multiple pregnancies have been referred to as a violation of heir space, so lipomatosis verbalis, or fatty degeneration of the vocabulary, is a violation of available medical-journal space. It seems justifiable to examine the etiology (that lovely word, so often misused to mean simple "cause," as here and in "the etiology of her broken hip was a fall from a bidet") of lipomatosis verbalis. Testimony of numerous authorities indicts, as the principal offenders, three types of writers, classifiable as-

1. The Carry-out Type
2. The Iakrogenic Narrator
3. The Cliche Addict

The carry-out type of surgeon finds it impossible just to operate; he must "carry out an operation"; the carry-out type of anesthesiologist would die before he would simply intubate a patient; he must "carry out an intubation"; If all this seems merely to be editorial fun and games, think a mo-

ment of the saving in your reading time. . . "Washing of the cells is carried out by this machine," changed to read, "This machine washes cells," results in a 50 percent saving in space ! . . . An uncongenial congener of iatrogenic drug-ging substitutes **k** for **t** in the third position. Writers still use the 19th century form, "the author," in the 20th century: . . . Such humbleness and sedateness are reminiscent of the modest spinster who held her hands over her breasts when being fluoroscoped. . The classic iakrogenic narrator fleshes out his paper with such fascinating but not always vital details as-"The patient was then removed from his bed to an O.R. cart and brought to the operating room where he was transferred to the operating table, prepped, and draped." The only information missing is whether the orderly used the east or the west elevators. . In many papers, "statistics" (in quotes, because so often recalling Dr. Kenneth C. Sawyer's Colorado rancher who tallied his cows by counting teats and dividing by 4) appear to be dragged in by their unequal tails. Many an article which would be valuable as a brief Clinical Note is returned to the author because the writer felt compelled to "flesh it out." Such material, therefore, however valid in an article intended for the initiated, becomes iakrogenic to the generality. As one commentator has said, a double-blind study often means one in which both the reader and the author are kept in the dark. So what's wrong with cliches? First and foremost (a favorite!), they obfuscate the clarity essential in scientific writing, achieved only through selection of **le mot juste**--the exactly-right word. Last but not least (another favorite!) they employ two or more words where one would suffice. . A happy medium (cliche) must be sought between the Scylla of (cliche) telegraphic terseness and the Charybdis (cliche) of verbal volubility, on the one hand (cliche) to hold the hurried and on the other hand (cliche) to con-

vince the cautious. . . . The cure of lipomatosis verbalis? One copy of "Scientific Writing," by Lester King and Charles Roland (A.M.A., 1968) taken PRN until its precepts have become second nature, will cure the most stubborn case.

The Communications Gap

(presented by

E. Clinton Texter, MD, Biocommunications-70)

The late Sir Winston Churchill once said that in reference to the conduct of World War II, the United States and Great Britain were the only Allies that were separated by a common language. . . The gap I have reference to concerns the gap separating different dialects or idioms of a single language. . . Language separates the people of the world though it is apparent from international and world congresses that more and more English is becoming the "lingua franca" of the world. There are other types of gaps. Words, of course, were the original means of communication. Gradually, society has developed more formally organized language and ultimately a written language. Knowledge is still limited due to the delay in transmitting from one to another, which involved laborious copying which was always subject to error. . Of the various methods of communication, writing is one of the oldest, the cheapest, and most readily produced. It is by no means the easiest. . . I share a conviction with Dr. Lois DeBakey that medical writing can be learned but it is questionable whether it can be taught. . Because of its economy, it will probably remain the mainstay of communication of scientific advances for a long time to come.

I am mindful of the admonition of your chairman, Mr. Smith, who emphasizes the need for clear, precise writing, a point with which I would certainly agree. . . This audience is more concerned with visual communication than with communication by word, though it is my feeling that these two areas go very much together. From a practical standpoint, there are limitations in the matter of visual material that can be presented in a

standard journal article or medical textbook. On the other hand, certain things can be taught much better by visual means of communication than by word of mouth. . . I do not look upon visual communication and writing for publication as being competitive in any way, but rather being complimentary to one another. . . We have set up a department of communications at the Scott and White Clinic which encompasses Audio-visual, Photography, and Publications. One of the gaps at the present time concerns the advanced state of our technology and the relatively little use that we make of it in most institutions. Part of the difficulties concern funding of these new technologies. . . ; F. Peter Woodford in "Science," May 12, 1967, the topic "Sounder Thinking through Clearer Writing" indicates that a graduate course on scientific writing, if appropriately designed, can strengthen scientific thinking. He agrees that standard of writing does matter and that there has been a decline in the writing, reading, and thinking--all of these things going together. . . Writing should not be ponderous but should be easy to read. . . It seems to me that perhaps some physicians have a style and manner of writing which is good from the beginning where others have to learn from their colleagues. It is worth noting that many famous men have been noted by their writing rather than as physicians. . . How does one learn to write well for publication? Perhaps one of the best ways is to learn by example and the example is not to read medical examples but by and large to read well known writers. . . Things may not be immediately discernible in what a man writes, and in this sometimes he is fortunate; but eventually they are quite clear and by these and the degree of alchemy that he possesses he will endure or be forgotten. . . Organizations for writers palliate the writer's loneliness but I doubt if they improve his writing. . . He does his work alone and if he is a good enough writer, he must face eternity, or the lack of it, each day.



Katherine Becker receives fellowship from Jerome Harris, PhD, 1970 awards chairman.

FIVE RECEIVE AMWA AWARDS

At the American Medical Writers Association's 30th Annual Meeting three presentations were made. Honor Awards went to: The journal, **Perspectives in Biology and Medicine**, accepted by the editor, Dwight J. Ingle, MD; Joseph Garland, MD, editor emeritus of the **New England Journal of Medicine**, and Lois DeBakey, PhD, professor of science communications at the Baylor College of Medicine.

Active lifetime Fellowships were presented to Katherine True Becker and Vincent F. Downing.

MISCELLANEOUS INFORMATION

The Charles B. Slack Company and AMWA's executive office, have recently moved. The new address is 6900 Grove, Thorofare, New Jersey 08086. The phone number is (609) 848-1000.

All members should have recently received the **AMWA Membership Directory**. If yours did not arrive, contact the Executive Office.

The Board of Directors has approved an application from the Los Angeles chapter to change its name to the Pacific-Southwest Chapter.

Members interested in forming a chapter for the southeastern U.S. should contact : Frances H. Porcher, 93 Sheridan Drive, N.E., Apt. 5, Atlanta, Ga. 30305.

The proposed AMWA Freelance Directory is the project of the Publications Committee. Members interested in being listed for a small fee, to support publication cost, should contact: Mrs. Elvira Stahl, P.O. Box 6115, Montreal, Canada.

The Job Market

Please send all Job Market replies to: The Charles B. Slack Company, 6900 Grove, Thorofare, New Jersey 08086. Remember to use the code in all correspondence.

POSITIONS WANTED:

(Alpha) Free-lancer looking for work in medical translating, writing, or library research. Can translate German and French into English.

(Beta) Full-time or free-lance work in Houston area sought for writer/editor. Previously employed as chief of technical literature and consulting medical editor for a major pharmaceutical firm.

POSITIONS AVAILABLE:

(Gamma) Full-time editor/writer needed to assist in preparing reports for biomedical engineering, cardiovascular, surgical, and research program. Experience in editing reports for professional literature essential.

NEWS FROM AMWA CHAPTERS

On November 6, the North Central Chapter held a dinner meeting to discuss **Two Kinds of Medical News Reporting-to the Public, and to the Peers**. Special guest speakers were Dr. Milton M. Hurwitz of St. Paul, senior associate editor of **Geriatrics**, (moderator), and John S. Najarian, MD, and Phillip J. Tichenor, PhD, (panelists).

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The Pacific Southwest Chapter will be holding a series of seminar/workshops on medical writing scheduled for March of '71 in Anaheim, Calif.

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The New York Chapter has elected their officers for the coming year. They are: President-elect-Harry A. Sweeney, Jr., Vice President-Hans H. Zinsser, MD, Secretary-Suzanne Loebel, and Treasurer-A. Grace Pierce, MD.

DR. EGEBERG (Cont.)

product goes up. . . . Another result of imbalance of supply and demand is poor distribution. . . The leverage is in the affluent suburbs, and that, not surprisingly, is where health care resources abound. . . . The inequity of supply and demand encourages the more inefficient, wasteful, and costly methods of delivering health care. People who have health insurance get sent to the hospital when they don't really need to be there, simply because their insurance will pay for hospital care but not for office or home care. . . . These serious and worsening problems have not been made known to a large slice of the American people, chiefly those who are not poor. . . I don't pretend to be a judge of the news value of events. . . But I do feel very deeply that the seeming appeal of universal health insurance as it is being championed today results from a serious lack of information on the part of the American people. And that same lack of information is a major impediment to the efforts we are trying to make toward dealing with the crisis in health care. In the last analysis, government will not determine how we deal with the health care crisis, neither will the health professionals. For this is a public issue, and it will be resolved as the public wants it to be. My plea is that the public be in the best possible position to reach informed judgments.

DR. GODE DIES AT 63

Alexander Gode, PhD, translator and lexicographer and a life fellow of AMWA, died of cancer, August 10, at age 63.

He was president of the Metropolitan New York Chapter in 1966 and founded the American Translators Association as well as *Interlingua*. Recently, a UNESCO affiliate, the International Federation of Translators, named him the first winner of the International Translation Prize.

Dr. Gode is survived by his wife and two children.

NATIONAL CHAIRMEN NAMED FOR '71

Thirteen outstanding members have been named by President Eric W. Martin to lead the Association's standing committees for the coming year.

The new committee chairmen:

Awards — Mrs. Mildred Hoerr Lysle, head of the editorial department, Cleveland Clinic Foundation.

Budget and Finance—William D. Nelligan, executive director, American College of Cardiology, Bethesda, Md.

Constitution and Bylaws—Milton J. Schiffrin, PhD, director of drug regulatory affairs, Hoffman-La-Roche, Nutley, N.J.

Education—Lois DeBakey, PhD, professor of scientific communications, Baylor College of Medicine, Houston.

Exhibit&—Harold Laufman, MD, director of the Institute for Surgical Studies, Montefiore Hospital, Bronx, N.Y.

Fellowships—Joel Shapiro, director of medical communication, Wallace Pharmaceuticals, Cranbury, N.J.

Liaison—Abe Rubin, DPM, vice president and dean, Ohio College of Podiatric Medicine, Cleveland.

Membership—John P. Connors, managing editor, Medical World News, New York City.

Nominating — N. Henry Moss, MD, associate clinical professor of surgery, Temple University, Philadelphia.

Program—Robert Dunbar, director of public information, American Fund for Dental Education, Chicago, general chairman for 1971 annual meeting (Chicago) ; and E. Clinton Texter, MD, chairman of clinical physiology, Scott and White Clinic, Temple, Tex., general chairman for 1972 (Dallas).

Publications—Mrs. Elvira Stahl, Ayerst Laboratories, Montreal.

Public and Professional Relations—Stephen T. Donohue, president Stephen T. Donohue Co., New York City.

Dr. Martin will head the AMWA Executive Committee in his capacity as president.

NEW JOB SERVICE FOUNDED BY MEMBER

A unique placement service has been founded by long-time AMWA member, Shirley Motter Linde, in New York City.

The new company, Med-Assist, Inc., is geared to supplying temporary help in the medical field, as well as the permanent positions customarily listed.

"The personnel on call include nurses, nurses aides, medical aides, receptionists and medical secretaries, as well as medical writers and editors, translators, transcribers and technicians," Mrs. Linde explains.

A sampling of recent job listing, of interest to AMWA members follows.

Beginning science writer for medical publisher in Washington, D.C.

Production manager for medical magazine in New Jersey outside- Manhattan (\$14-17,000).

Director of public relations; medical and industrial media contacts needed; Manhattan-- (\$15-20,000).

Editor of newspaper to surpeons: Manhattan (\$15-18,000).

Nutrition writer. Chicago.

Account exec. Under 35, dynamic, marketing or ad agency experience; New York (\$18-20,000).

Write to Med-Assist, Inc., 909 Third Ave., N.Y. 10022 or Call 212-751-1053.

The 1975 annual meeting will held in Philadelphia, celebrating nation's bicentennial.