



Message from the President . . .

by Julia Forjanic Klapproth

EMWA has been growing in leaps and bounds in the last few years. What began as the brainchild of a few eager medical writers with a vision, is now coming of age. With over 400 members and its own educational programme (the EMWA Professional Development Programme), the organisation has become a recognised landmark for medical writers in Europe and around the globe.

Until recently, EMWA mostly brought writers together and recruited volunteers to do something (anything!) for the organisation. Whether it was finding people to share their knowledge and experience in the form of workshops, or to offer their time and enthusiasm in a position on the Executive Committee (EC), the main point was to get people involved. EMWA activities have traditionally been driven by a group of people full of ideas and enthusiasm, with very little in terms of formalised processes to guide those activities. In a small organisation, this is effective and sufficient because it is possible to maintain an overview of what people are doing.

Now, however, as EMWA matures into a larger and more professional organisation, I can see the need to provide some degree of a formalised framework within which the large body of members and the EC officers can orient themselves. There needs to be continuity from one year to the next, as officers hand over their positions to the newly elected. We need to think about where EMWA is going and where we want it to go. And we need to establish an infrastructure that clearly defines our processes gives us guidance around the intricacies of administering and running a growing organisation.

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To this end, I have started working on an EMWA organisational handbook, and Stephen de Looze has prepared an EMWA Workshop Leaders Handbook. These two documents should establish an infrastructure for how our organisation functions (all those little details that everyone encounters at some point or another and isn't sure where to find the answer... like what exactly is the intended role of the Membership Officer? Or, exactly which expenses are covered for workshop leaders?). Having such documents should provide transparency and clarity for everyone involved. Of course, we have the constitution, but after only 2 years, you will have discovered that it is already out of date. Indeed, the constitution needs to be amended, and the amended document will form the basis of the EMWA organisational handbook.

The Write Stuff

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One example of how I hope the organisational handbook will improve things, will be to define an appropriate process for our elections at the General Assembly. I was quite dissatisfied at the General Assembly in Montpellier, as we raced through the "exercise" of presenting the positions that were open for election and the ensuing voting (in the absence of any contenders). It is my intention that, from now on, all posts that are up for election at a coming General Assembly will be announced prior to the meeting, together with a description of the responsibilities that accompany the respective posts. In this way, people will have time to think about whether or not they would like to stand for election ahead of time (not in the 30 seconds after being made aware that a post is available!), and we can prepare nominations before the election.

It is organisational details like these that I will address and lay out in the organisational handbook, with the goal of making EMWA an organisation where everyone feels that they are an informed member. If anyone has any thoughts or suggestions for areas that they think are unclear about how the EMWA is run, please let me know so that I can find a way to provide transparency on every aspect of the organisation. Once these handbooks are complete, they will be available to everyone: probably using the website, as well as being published in instalments in TWS. It is my hope that by instituting a few essential guidelines, everyone will have a better understanding of how EMWA functions and people will feel fully informed on the activities of the organisation.

To maintain the essence of what EMWA has always been is to prevent anyone from feeling that they are outside of a group of a privileged few who are running the show. EMWA is the product of all of its members working together to share their knowledge and to raise awareness of medical writing. I hope that by laying a few cornerstones for an infrastructure, we can help EMWA stay true to the sense of community that it was founded on and continue to grow as a professional organisation that meets the needs of its members.

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