

4-letter words and others (4)

Of

I include *of* for one reason now, although there are many other reasons to discuss the use of *of* in English: it is used incorrectly by writers in Continental Europe in one specific way when they are reporting on clinical trials. *Patients of this study ...* is not correct. *Patients in this study* is what is most frequently used, and *Patients from this study ...* may also be appropriate: *Patients from this study with a final DBP > 90 mmHg were not included in the supplementary analyses.* *From* is also used when required by a verb: *We selected patients from this study for the analysis of ...*

Man

It is just as easy to say *humans* as *man*. I have now switched to the former completely (and, I am proud to say, spontaneously. By that I mean, I don't spontaneously write *man* and correct it to *humans*), but I still do see *man* being

used when 'all human beings' is meant. There are women who do not object to *man* used this way, but I suspect they are a small minority, so that is no argument.

A client recently insisted that I put *male patient* and *female patient* in subject narratives because "they are not just men and women, they are patients". If I have my choice, I say: A 55-year-old *man* with gastro-oesophageal cancer was treated for 4 weeks with X and developed X. Why? We all know he was a *patient*, and the poor *man* had gastro-oesophageal cancer.

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Reference:

1. Pearsall J, Trumble B. *The Oxford English Reference Dictionary*. Oxford: OUP, 1996.

Working from home—The best of both worlds?

Like many other EMWA members that I've met, I realised whilst doing my PhD that I enjoyed writing up the results of experiments far more than actually performing them. Medical writing was, therefore, the obvious choice of career and so I became an office-based medical writer in a Contract Research Organisation. When office-based, I'd often dreamed (as I'm sure many do) of working from home, with an idyllic vision of being able to do the washing, go for a run and clean the house in my lunch breaks, instead of working or surfing the internet whilst trying not to drop breadcrumbs into my keyboard. However, living only 11 miles from the office, with great transport links, didn't really give me much excuse to realise that vision.

Whilst I was pregnant with my second child and literally the day before we were due to exchange contracts on a new house, my husband dropped the bombshell that his job was being moved from London to Switzerland. The timing of the announcement, coming just as we were about to commit ourselves to a massive mortgage and months of home renovations, made us think that maybe we should take the plunge and move.

I wanted to return to work after having my baby (yes, I'm weird that way) but my husband's job was moved to Zurich, a good hour away from my company's Swiss office, and at least that far from those of most other companies that employ medical writers. The life of a freelancer had never really appealed as I love being part of an office with all the associated support, job stability and opportunities (as well as social life and gossip). Medical writers at Quintiles are normally office based at one of our medical writing team hubs but because I'd been with the company for several years, it was agreed that I could

work from my new home in Zurich rather than have to leave a job that I enjoyed.

Adjusting to working from home was, fortunately, easier than I expected. Although I'm officially employed by my company's Swiss office, I'm still managed from the UK and I consider myself to be part of the UK team in spirit, if not often in person. I miss the everyday office banter and the frequent nights out, but with my mobile phone and MS Office Communicator, I'm as available as ever, plus I keep in the gossip loop! I have a view of Lake Zurich, instead of Bracknell town centre and staying late at the office to catch up just means going into the study after the kids have gone to bed. The kids have a fantastic lifestyle and my 4-year old is already a competent skier. They also get to see their grandparents much more than when we lived in the UK, even though they live in the UK themselves. However, my vision of the perfect work-life balance hasn't quite worked out. Although I work about 80% of a full-time contract, I face the perennial problem of working mothers in that the majority of my earnings go on childcare. Also, there simply isn't time at lunchtime to cook, clean or go for a run. In fact, the house is messier than ever because I have lunch at home and I still find myself dropping crumbs into the keyboard. My weight is also creeping up, as I frequently raid the fridge, whereas when I was in the office, I felt too ashamed to visit the chocolate machine more than once a day. All things considered though, I think I've probably got the best of both the office- and home-based worlds.

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