

EMWA Member Satisfaction Survey: The details

Helen Baldwin gave a summary of the answers to the general questions in the EMWA Member Satisfaction Survey in her article published in the last issue of *The Write Stuff* [17(4):190-3]. Here the Education Officer, Website Manager and Journal Editor report and comment on the details of your answers relating to their areas of responsibility.

The EMWA Professional Development Programme

The EMWA Professional Development Programme, or EPDP, forms the core of every EMWA conference. Since its inception in the year 2000, the EPDP has grown meteorically, and diversified and broadened into the foundation and advanced levels [1]. The results of the Member Satisfaction Survey thus come very timely at this stage in the development of the EPDP, when EMWA's membership is itself rapidly growing and diversifying.

The scores and comments from the survey on the EPDP-related questions (questions 22 to 28) give pointers to the direction that the EPDP should move. Several steps have already been taken as a result of the survey, as I shall describe below. The message from many comments is that a better explanation is needed concerning the way the EPDP works, which I shall also address in this article.

Enrolment in the EPDP

Questions 22 and 23 of the survey asked whether respondents were enrolled in the EPDP, and if not, why not.

About 50% of respondents were EPDP enrolled, in either the foundation or the advanced programme, or both. Half of the respondents who were not enrolled did not require EPDP certification, or had already obtained the certificates they needed. Of the rest, the biggest reason for non-enrolment was uncertainty of the benefits of enrolment, or that new members had simply not yet had the opportunity to join the programme.

Whether obtaining an EPDP certificate would be of benefit will be a matter of one's personal goals, ambitions and career path. From my own experience as an employer of medical writers for over twenty years, I believe that EPDP certification brings considerable benefits, and I have heard from many others that this is so. However, EMWA members may attend EPDP workshops without being enrolled in the EPDP. No certification is then awarded (also not ret-

respectively if the member subsequently enrolls) but of course the participants still have the full educational benefit of the workshops.

The cost of EPDP enrolment covers administrative expenses associated with tracking EPDP credits and issuing certificates. A few responses suggested that cost was prohibitive. Since the cost of EPDP enrolment is €100 per level, good for five years, or only €20 per level per year, there may be confusion between the cost of EPDP enrolment and the cost attending workshops themselves: the overall value for money of the EPDP is discussed below in connection with question 27.

Administration of the EPDP

The majority of respondents (85%) felt that administration of the EPDP (question 24) was good or excellent, but an alarming 15% of respondents were dissatisfied. As Helen Baldwin mentioned in her article on the survey, EMWA has been taking measures to remedy this.

The reasons most commonly given for dissatisfaction related to delays or errors in credit statements. The new EMWA website now enables members to check their credit records online, and Head Office have initiated a 'data cleanse' to reveal any discrepancies between the credit database and members' personal records. Since the start of the data cleanse, we have been able to resolve errors in the database, or clarify that in some cases, no credit could be awarded (e.g. due to non-enrolment in the EPDP at the time of the workshop). I am confident that direct access by members to their credit records via the website will now resolve these sources of dissatisfaction, now and in the future.

Some of the responses revealed a misunderstanding of how the accreditation system works. For example, some members were under the impression that they must acquire sufficient credits within a specific timeframe to obtain accreditation. There is in fact no time limit to obtain accreditation, only a re-enrolment in the EPDP after five years. To address these and other questions, I have thoroughly revised and updated the EPDP Brochure which was re-issued in October 2008 and is available on the EMWA website.

Choice of workshops in the EPDP

Overall, 92% of respondents were satisfied with the choice of workshops in the EPDP (question 25) and there were many positive comments. There was evidently a need for

EMWA Member Satisfaction Survey: The details

an updated list of all workshops in the programme since many comments contained suggestions for topics that are already included. I have now provided this list in the new EPDP Brochure.

Some respondents commented on the limited choice of advanced workshops in the programme as compared to foundation workshops, others on the balance of the programme at each conference. Some respondents asked why the most popular workshops were not run twice per conference. In order to address these issues, I would like to explain how the EPDP works.

Many new members may not realize that EPDP workshop leaders provide their services for free. This applies not only to running the workshop itself but for the time spent before and after the workshop in preparing materials and marking up to 32 assignments per workshop. Some workshop leaders provide two or even three workshops at each conference, which represents a very hefty workload. These voluntary contributions enable workshop fees to be kept very much lower than those charged by commercial training organisations. The arrangement also strengthens the spirit of EMWA, which serves to bring experienced and less experienced medical writers together for networking, training and professional development. However the voluntary nature of the workshop leader contributions does place constraints on the availability of workshop leaders and topics at any given conference.

The advanced programme was separated out of the EPDP for its own certification in 2005 (before then, the EPDP certificate consisted of a mixture of advanced and foundation topics) and is still growing [1]. As with the EPDP in general, the availability of advanced topics depends on members coming forward with proposals to run advanced workshops. For those interested, the process of development of a workshop is described in the Workshop Leaders Handbook, which I have also now revised extensively (December 2008) and is available on the website. Prospective workshop leaders will find everything they need to know in the Handbook. A crucial feature of the EPDP is that workshop leaders are supported by the EMWA Professional Development Committee (EPDC) throughout the development of their workshop, and new workshop leaders are assigned an EPDC mentor.

As Education Officer, I assemble the EPDP schedule at each conference. A few respondents to question 25 noted that there was an overlap of interesting topics. Naturally, I am delighted that there are so many interesting topics in the EPDP that overlap is unavoidable! The starting point in assembling the workshop programme is however the availability of workshop leaders, who must let me know up to a year in advance if they can attend a conference and present one or more workshops. I then aim to provide, at each session, a maximum choice of EPDP options and levels. In doing so, I have to consider that workshop leaders may have other commitments during the conference (such as running a discussion forum, observing a new workshop, attending training, participating on another committee or

running other workshops), or may not be present for the whole conference. Occasionally, a workshop leader may have to withdraw from the conference at short notice. These factors can distort the 'ideal' timetable.

However, compared to just a few years ago, there is now a very wide workshop choice at each conference, and there will always be another conference where you can take the workshops unavailable this time round. The registration form now allows participants to provide first and second choices per session, which will further optimize everyone's personal conference planning.

Quality of workshops in the EPDP

Perhaps the most pleasing result of the survey on the EPDP is that 98% of respondents (question 26) found the quality of the EPDP workshops good or excellent. Many comments reflected this, though there were some more critical remarks.

The Workshop Leaders Handbook describes the EPDP quality control procedures, which include mentoring and observing new workshops, running them under assessment, providing free training for workshop leaders, and assessing participant evaluations for every workshop. The Handbook, which I hope will be read by all EMWA members and not just prospective workshop leaders, should answer most of the comments and questions on workshop quality control. It also addresses the issue raised by some respondents as to why a 'one-size-fits-all' approach cannot be applied to all workshops and workshop leaders.

The input of workshop participants on evaluation forms is crucial to the ongoing quality assessment of workshops. The following calculation reveals the scale of data management now required. A conference that includes 50 EPDP workshops (as the forthcoming conference in Ljubljana) with an average of 20 participants per workshop means 1000 evaluation forms, each of which contains 8 scored items plus comments. Entering eight thousand items of data and hundreds of comments into a database is not a trivial task! Head Office fortunately is now able to dedicate the resources to manage this. The evaluation forms from all 'under assessment' workshops will be transferred to a database during the conference for immediate review by the EPDC, which meets on the last conference day. All other evaluation forms will now be processed at Head Office within a couple of weeks of the conference and made available electronically to workshop leaders and the EPDC. The evaluation scores and comments will be tracked on a spreadsheet per workshop, so that any quality-related issues over time can be identified, addressed by the workshop leader, and followed up by the EPDC.

Value for money of the EPDP

Question 27 showed that 89% of members thought the EPDP was good value, though 11% disagreed. The latter result is surprising given the positive assessment of quality and choice provided by the EPDP, and I would like to offer the following thoughts on EMWA's pricing policy.

EMWA is a non-profit organisation and all of its income is

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>>> EMWA Member Satisfaction Survey: The details

absorbed into the running and management of EMWA activities. As mentioned above, the voluntary nature of the workshop leaders contributions (and of course the contributions of the EPDC, workshop leader trainers and observers) significantly reduce EMWA's costs.

Workshop fees (€135 per foundation workshop and €210 per advanced workshop), which make up a large proportion of EMWA's income, have not increased for several years. About the only way that they could be made substantially lower would be to run only the most popular workshops which fill to (near) capacity, though whether we would have sufficient workshop leaders interested in running these workshops at every conference is another matter. However, EMWA believes that the conferences should also offer specialist topics even if they attract fewer participants. This also extends to exploring new topics that may not be immediate block-busters when run under assessment, and new formats with restricted participant numbers, such as the recently introduced 'master class', that provide more intense training. The cross-subsidy of such workshops by the most popular ones enables the ongoing growth and diversification of the EPDP. Given the strong interest shown by respondents in broadening the choice of available workshops, this is clearly the correct approach.

By having the flexibility to branch out into new areas, EMWA will also increase its appeal to new segments of potential membership, further catalysing the growth and strength of the association. The ever more rapidly increasing membership numbers show that EMWA is on the right track in this respect.

Last but not least, the EPDP is one of the few opportunities to obtain certification in medical writing. The approval and ongoing quality control of the workshops by leading medical writing professionals is unmatched by any commercial training organisation, and the workshop leaders themselves are amongst the most accomplished professionals in the field. These aspects, together with the low workshop fees, add up to very good value for money compared to other training opportunities available.

New areas for the EPDP

The responses to question 28, expansion of the EPDC into new areas, provided many interesting suggestions for new EPDP workshop topics. Some are in fact already in the programme, and as I mentioned earlier, the new EPDP Brochure gives up-to-date information. Some responses to question 35 (areas that EMWA should be targeting as an association) overlapped with this question.

Specific topics that were suggested and are not yet in the EPDP (or only partially covered) include:

- Investigational medicinal product dossiers
- Understanding laboratory data
- Health economics
- Non-clinical writing
- Medical devices
- Management and training of medical writers
- Advanced pharmacology*
- Impact of different linguistic backgrounds of medical writers*
- Medical marketing
- Business skills*

Some of these topics (e.g. advanced pharmacology or business skills) could in fact be several workshops; those marked with an asterisk have, since the survey was conducted, been included in the EPDP in some form and will run under assessment in Ljubljana in May 2009. Some suggestions (e.g. patents, career development, freelancer needs, and computer skills) would probably be more suited to non-EPDP parts of the EMWA conference or are already provided outside the EPDP and could be further developed.

Aside from the specific topics listed above, there are whole EPDP options that would benefit from addition of new workshops, most notably Medical Communications and Medical Science at both foundation and advanced levels—gaps that were also noted in some of the more general responses to question 28. Moreover, as EMWA's membership grows, entirely new options may emerge, such as medical writing in television, radio and films.

So this is my cue for a call for new workshop leaders! The EPDP (and EMWA generally) depends on the skills and expertise of members willing to support the association as workshop leaders. Even though these contributions are voluntary, supporting the association brings its own reward for many workshop leaders. In addition, workshop leaders sharpen their training skills and, by reaching a wide audience, may establish contacts which are fruitful in their professional activities outside EMWA. Being an EMWA workshop leader can also look great on a CV.

All proposals for new workshops can be sent to me, whether on any of the above topics or any other topic you may wish to present. I will pass on to the EC all suggestions that may be more suited to run as seminars, forums or other events outside the EPDP.

Finally, I would like to add my thanks to those of my fellow EC members to everyone who took the time and trouble to complete the EMWA satisfaction survey and contribute to shaping EMWA's future.

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Reference:

1. de Looze S. Educating Medical Writers: A Personal History. *The Write Stuff* 2008;17(1):12-14.

EMWA Member Satisfaction Survey: The details

Summary of the EMWA Volunteer Reimbursement Policy

EMWA is a not-for-profit organisation that relies on volunteers. Executive Committee (EC) members, EMWA Professional Development Committee (EPDC) members, workshop leaders, seminar leaders etc. give their time and expertise voluntarily. Volunteers, with prior approval from the Treasurer, are offered reimbursement of expenses from the association. The precise extent of the reimbursement varies according to the contribution and its value to the association. However, all volunteers who qualify for reimbursement are fully informed of their entitlement before they incur any expenses.

In brief, volunteers are entitled to the following:

- Waiver of conference registration fee*
- Accommodation in the conference hotel (maximum 4 nights)
- Travel expenses** (economy class)

* One day only for invited speakers or leaders of short workshops

** Panel members may be reimbursed for travel expenses OR registration but not both.

A complete copy of the reimbursement policy is available in the members only section of the website (<http://www.emwa.org/InDevelopment/Policies-VolunteerReimbursement.html>), or from Head Office.

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The EMWA Website: An online community for our organisation

Over the last couple of years, EMWA has made a considerable investment into the EMWA website and the online features it offers to EMWA members. In May of last year, we saw the launch of a new website, built using cutting-edge web technology designed to provide a much more interactive web experience. Whilst retaining old favourites, such as the job adverts and conference pages, the new website also offers numerous opportunities for the EMWA membership to network, share opinions and promote our profession as whole.

The work did not stop with the launch. Since then we have been collating feedback from the EMWA membership, with the aim of refining the website so that it meets all the need of EMWA members. EMWA's website is an ever-evolving entity; this evolution is largely dependent on feedback and contributions from the EMWA membership. In the recent EMWA Member Satisfaction Survey, we were

pleased to see that 92% of survey respondents rated the new website as 'excellent' or 'good'. However, we were also pleased to see that so many respondents had taken the time to provide invaluable feedback on the new website and its features to the web team.

The conference pages continued to be a favourite with EMWA members, with 76% of survey respondents stating that these pages were of particular interest to them. Last year saw the unveiling of the new online conference booking system, which has had a huge impact on the efficiency of the conference registration process, and an updated conference listing, which allows for easy scheduling of conference activities. About a third of survey respondents thought the freelancer and company listing were another interesting feature. However, a number of people felt that the format and content of the listing was not quite right. In the months following the Spring conference, the web team worked closely with Alistair Reeves, Sam Hamilton and Jo Whelan to obtain more detailed feedback on the listing from freelance EMWA members. This feedback was collated and is informing the future development of a new and improved listing.

It was also clear from the survey that some of EMWA members were not yet aware that new features were being offered on the website. By now you should have received our 'Top 10 reasons for members to use EMWA's website', which provided information about the new Discussion Forum, *Wiki-encyclopaedia*, Member Blogs, Events Calendar, Useful Links database, and Photo Gallery, and I am thrilled to see these features are now being viewed and used. Alistair Reeves has created a Freelancer Discussion Forum, which is a separate forum dedicated to issues relevant to freelance EMWA members. An e-mail notification system means that users of the forum can get an immediate notification anytime someone posts something new, making sure no-one has to miss out on the debate. Requests for other specialised forums are welcome.

In the upcoming year, you can expect to see further changes to the design, content and features of the website. Most importantly perhaps, feedback on the new navigation system suggested that it needed to be simplified. The web team are currently working to refine the navigation system, so it is easier to find specific information and features. In response to the request for more information about workshops, we are creating a searchable online database of all of the EMWA workshops and workshop leaders. We are also developing a new file management feature on the website that will allow workshop participants to download pre- and post-workshop assignments, workshop handouts and other resources provided by the workshop leaders. Recently, we unveiled the new look Journal pages, which offer access to the current and all past issues of *The Write Stuff*, as individual downloadable pdfs, as far back as 2002. In an exciting development, we have also managed to track down even earlier issues of *The Write Stuff*, and will be soon offering access to these articles via the website.

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>>> EMWA Member Satisfaction Survey: The details

One survey respondent spoke of the new website stating, “Now it (the website) is appealing (to) a wider range of people ... I believe EMWA will receive more contributions from its members and be a much more active organisation”. This perfectly captures my vision for the website. I hope that as EMWA continues to grow and become more vibrant, the website too will become a more vibrant face for our organisation. The website is already a valuable resource, but, with your help, it can grow into an invaluable one. Through *Wiki-encyclopaedia* articles, blogs, active discussion forums, an online journal article archive and useful website links, the EMWA website will hopefully become a one-stop shop for information about EMWA, its members and our profession. The website also now offers a number of ways in which to network with other EMWA members outside of the twice-yearly conferences. Whether it be by posting a blog or by joining or starting a discussion forum, the website offers a way to connect with other members, discuss important issues or gain useful advice. Your involvement in our thriving online community will drive the future development of EMWA’s face to the world.

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The Write Stuff (TWS): The journal for European medical writers

“You can please all the people some of the time, and some of the people all the time, but you cannot please all the people all the time.” This quote is a variation on one of Abraham Lincoln’s pearls of wisdom, in which he spoke about fooling rather than pleasing. I am not fooled into thinking that you can’t at least try to please most of the people most of the time. But there is little you can do without knowing what they want. This is why I would like to thank all the EMWA members who took the time to complete the section of the EMWA Member Satisfaction Survey relating to *TWS*.

In this short report I want to concentrate on the answers to the free-text question “Is there anything that you would like to see included in future editions?” Some of the suggestions made in this section of the survey have already been implemented. The regulatory theme of this issue and the statistics theme for the September 2009 issue, to be guest-edited by Adam Jacobs, are responses to requests for more articles on regulatory and statistics topics. Other examples of suggestions that have been implemented are the translation section introduced in the last issue, definitions boxes on page 197 of the last issue [17(4)] and page 10 in this issue, and some practical advice about billing on page 211 of the last issue.

Another request made in the survey was for more sources for, or links to, tips on better writing. To meet this request readers are invited to submit their personal favourites for inclusion in a box like the one on page 5 in this issue of *TWS*. Calls were also made for information on guidelines and for updates on changes in legislation relating to clinical trials and medical writing. Kathy Thomas and Claudia Tesch as well as Deborah Zarin have kept us abreast of the FDA Amendments Act, 2007 [16(2)67-72, 17(2)70-73, 17(4):198]. Is there anybody out there who would be prepared to write an article or box on any guidelines or other legislation relevant to medical writers?

The following is a selection of article topics suggested by respondents to the survey. I would be delighted to receive articles on any these topics—you can be sure that at least one person will read the article!

- ‘Lessons learned’ kind of topics related to regulatory submissions (short boxes on isolated experiences would also be most welcome)
- Quality control
- Typical medical writer tasks but other than regulatory writing
- Non-clinical study regulation
- Medical communications
- Career development
- Literature databases
- Listing of different types of deliverables with the items that need to be incorporated
- Marketing of medical writing services

A request was also made for a listing of articles published by EMWA members in main journals. This would certainly be interesting and useful. A list is being compiled which will appear in the next issue of *TWS*. The list will then be retained on the website and new additions will be published in future issues of *TWS* and added to the list on the website. All EMWA members who have not already done so are invited to send me references to articles relevant to medical writing/biomedical publication or topics of general interest to medical writers that they have published during 2008 and 2009. The list will not include research or review papers on topics that are not specifically relevant to medical writing as such.

Three survey respondents asked for a wider diversity of authors. I admit that when I open the journal I also get the impression that I see the same faces. Maybe a solution would be to stop publishing author photos, because in fact the impression is false. Apart from the regular columns (*From the Editor’s desk*, *Message from the President*, *In the bookstores*, *Webscout* and *Journal watch*) *TWS* published 52 articles in 2008. These articles were written by 45 different authors (4 articles had 2 authors each). Furthermore over a third of the articles in the December issue were written by authors who are not members of EMWA. What about the regular columns? Two of *TWS*’s four issues this year will be guest-edited. This means a dif-

EMWA Member Satisfaction Survey: The details

ferent perspective and different authors for *From the Editor's desk*. The *Message from the President* has to be written by the President—no way around that. *In the bookshelves* reviewed 6 books last year—by 6 different authors. We hope that this year we will be able to make the person who asked for 'More book reviews' happy. Writing a book review is a very good training for article-writing. You also get to keep the book. So if anyone has a book in mind and would like to review it, please contact me. I doubt that any of the three comments were made with Joeyn's short *Webscout* articles in mind, because she has a remarkable knack of finding interesting and different topics. *Journal watch* is produced by the Dianthus team (three different authors last year), who do a valiant job. Anybody else who sees an article of interest to medical writers is welcome to write a box about it (for an example see the boxes on pages 10, column 1, 12 at the bottom of column 2 and 20, column 1).

Finally the message is clear. We will strive for more articles on grammar and style, more articles on regulatory

matters, and a greater number of entertaining articles about medical writing. But *TWS* needs members who will write these. And there are good reasons for writing an article. Authors retain the copyright, so they are free to put the pdf of their article on their website. For those who do not have websites or are not freelancers an article is an impressive addition to a CV. Yesterday an author who works in a pharmaceutical company asked for copies of an article he had written a few years ago. He wrote that he needed "some written material that demonstrates my breadth of writing. While I have many scientific examples, I'm lacking some of the easier reading samples". Not long ago, another author wrote to me excitedly to say that as a result of prospective employers reading her article written in *TWS* she had received two job offers!

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Correct tense vs practicalities (or, what is copyediting coming to?)

A referee's change to an abstract of an applied linguistics paper caused the author some consternation. The referee had changed "we have previously demonstrated that..." to "we previously demonstrated...". The conscientious author was keen to establish authority for the version as originally written by her and—knowing that verb tenses have their very special usage in scientific writing, especially the past and the present perfect—she sought the opinions of an array of expert linguists to find out why the simple past should replace her original present perfect. Finally, the case for the defence was ready for submission to the referee. But the wind was blown out of its sails when the referee replied that the reason for the change from the present perfect to the simple past had been that the abstract was already too long and that all unnecessary words had to be deleted!

With thanks to **Françoise Salager-Meyer** (francoise.sm@gmail.com) for this amusing, strange but true story.

NB: Readers of *TWS* can look forward to an article by Alistair Reeves in the June issue which will explore the complex area of the 'appropriate' use of the present perfect and simple past in biomedical manuscripts.

Do the words majority and minority take a singular or a plural noun?

I have found various and complicated answers to this question but the one I was most comfortable with was that given by the *Hutchinson Encyclopaedia*. It states that *majority* and *minority* are singular words that can be used alone but if they are used with another entity it should not be singular (an exception is cases like *minority of the committee*, which means a minority of the members of the committee). This means that usually *majority* and *minority* will take a plural verb. For example, *The majority of people thinks English is easy* just doesn't sound right. Does it? *Hutchinson* suggests a simple trick to find out the true subject of the sentence: if *many* or *most* can be substituted for *majority* and *fewer* for *minority* a plural verb is called for, e.g. *Most people think English is easy*. This works even if the subject of the sentence is not actually stated, e.g.

The majority of/most scientific papers are written in English

A minority/few are written in French

An example of where *majority* itself is the subject of the sentence is *the government's majority has grown*. And if the amount is specified either a singular or plural verb can be used, e.g. *A 60% majority have/has voted for the government*.

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