

■ Message from the President



Post-conference satisfaction survey

by Helen Baldwin

I'm writing this at the beginning of August in the middle of a very hot summer here in the South of France. It's too hot to work and I'm thinking of sticking my feet in a bucket of cold water while I write to soothe my swollen ankles covered in mosquito bites! Sadly, by the time you read this, the summer will be over and we'll all be back to the grindstone on our medical writing projects. However I do hope that you had a good summer and that you managed to recharge your batteries for the months ahead.

Behind the scenes at EMWA, many people were actually very busy during the summer months. In particular, we took the second step towards the re-activation of EMWA's UK-registered company and the closure of our Swiss company. The reasons for this have been described previously: The main aim is to reduce costs and facilitate the day-to-day administration of EMWA and thus allow head office staff and Executive Committee (EC) members to spend less time on administrative red tape and more time on improving EMWA's services to its members. The process has been performed in strict accordance with Swiss law and EMWA's Swiss lawyer has been closely involved in order to ensure that we manage this process in an entirely legal and democratic manner. The first step occurred at the annual general meeting (AGM) in Ljubljana at which the membership approved the motion to allow EMWA to re-active 'UK EMWA' and to close down 'Swiss EMWA' subject to, and conditional upon, admission to the UK entity by the majority of the members. The second step was therefore an invitation to all members to transfer their membership from 'Swiss EMWA' to 'UK EMWA' which was sent to all members by email and post in mid-July. I am delighted to announce that more than 50% of members accepted this invitation—so the process will be implemented by January 2010. I am confident that the transition will be handled very smoothly and that the services provided by EMWA will be improved thanks to the simplification of administrative and legal matters.

So what else happened at EMWA this summer? Well of course we had another very successful conference at the end of May in Slovenia. This year we performed a web-based post-conference satisfaction survey which gave us valuable insight into participants' opinions of the conference programme and organisation and will help us further improve our conferences in the future. We then started to plan our next three conferences to be held in Frankfurt on 12-14 November 2009, in Lisbon on 11-15 May 2010, and

in Nice on 11-13 November 2010. EMWA's head office has booked the conference hotels for each of these events and has negotiated very hard to obtain the best possible rates in this financially difficult climate.

EMWA conference registration and workshop fees have not increased for several years whilst hotel prices and other conference costs have continued to rise with inflation. It would be logical to increase registration and workshop fees at this time, but the EC recently decided not to do this in 2009. We are aware of employers' budget freezes and reduced freelance income, and we decided it would be better to find ways of reducing conference costs (without reducing the quality) rather than increasing fees. Those of you attending the Frankfurt conference will notice some of these cost-cutting measures. For example a simple recycled cotton bag will be provided instead of a plush briefcase—we already moved in this direction in Ljubljana and are going even further in Frankfurt. After ten years of attending EMWA conferences I have around 12-15 EMWA briefcases sitting doing nothing in my cupboard and I feel strongly that providing these is a waste of EMWA's money and a waste of the planet's valuable and limited resources. Two other rather expensive 'luxuries' are to be slimmed-down at the Frankfurt conference: the conference workbook and the welcome reception. The very attractive conference workbook provided in London and Ljubljana was rather expensive and not planet-friendly as it contained several plastic wallets and had a metal spiral spine—we are currently considering cheaper, recyclable models. Furthermore the welcome reception will be a drink and 'nibbles' (i.e. crisps and peanuts), but not a meal. These measures will provide substantial savings and thus enable us to continue to provide an excellent conference without having to increase our income from members. Furthermore, we have negotiated preferential hotel room rates in cheaper hotels near to the conference hotel in order to help those on a tight budget be able to afford to attend.

Conference cost cuts allow fees to be frozen

The post-conference survey showed that most participants feel that EMWA conferences are good value for money, and I am convinced that this is true. The main reason is that all EMWA workshop and seminar leaders, plenary speakers, panel presenters, and committee members give up their time for EMWA on an entirely voluntary basis as explained in detail in Stephen de Looze's article on page 180 of this issue. None of them is paid to attend our conferences or to develop their workshop materials. Presenters' travel ex-

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penses are reimbursed (up to a predefined limit) and their registration fee is waived (or a proportion of the fee depending on the length of the presentation they are giving)—but workshop fees and social event fees are not waived, so presenters still have to pay to attend other workshops, conference dinners etc. Why am I telling you this? Well there are two reasons: firstly I find it frustrating when I overhear members complaining that it's unfair that workshop leaders are paid to attend (that is totally untrue) and secondly I would like to encourage any member who would like to be a presenter to come forward and volunteer! It's certainly true that it's cheaper to attend the conference if you give a workshop or a seminar—so if you've got something interesting to teach other medical writers, please contact me or Stephen.

So that's me signing off from my second President's Message. I wish you a productive autumn and I hope to see you in November in Frankfurt.

Helen Baldwin

EMWA President
president@emwa.org

Themes of upcoming issues of TWS

The December issue of *TWS*, guest edited by Ursula Schoenberg (u.schoenberg@t-online.de), will have a medical communications theme. The March 2010 issue will have an authorship theme and will be guest edited by Iain Patten (iain.patten@ubcscisols.com). Articles are also invited on preclinical regulatory topics. Future issues featuring business and electronic communications for medical writers are planned.

Articles (up to 2500 words) and short reports/boxes (up to 1000 words) on these topics or any topics of interest to medical writers and editors, medical translators, or trainers in the field are very welcome.

Elise Langdon-Neuner

editor@emwa.org

TWS goes green

Journals, like clothes, have to keep up appearances to avoid looking worn and out-dated. But the changes that will be immediately evident in this issue of *TWS* are more than decorative.

The table of contents has been moved from the back cover to the first page inside the journal. This move releases the back cover, which is a valuable space for conference announcements and commercial advertising. While we have retained a robust cover, to reduce postage costs the inside pages are lighter in weight than in past issues. And—most importantly—*TWS* is now being printed on 100% recycled paper.

The binding has been changed from a stapled to what is called a perfect binding because the number of pages now exceeds those that can practically be bound by using staples. The journal has doubled its size from 32 pages per issue 5 years ago to what will be an average of at least 64 pages per issue in 2009. The change in the binding method also allows for more flexibility. With the old binding, single pages could not be added, as will be possible in future, because the paper had to fold into two pieces, making 4 pages. This meant that the number of pages in each issue had to be divisible by 4. For example, if the material for the issue filled 50 pages I either had to cut 2 pages out of the issue or find enough extra material to fill 2 more pages bringing the total number of pages up to 52. Believe me this juggling of pages was a bind.

We are also moving towards gathering together the short pieces and boxes under topic headings. Some of these headings will appear regularly in each future issue of the



photo: Nadja Meister

journal, e.g. 'Words, Grammar & Co.' and others will be occasional, e.g. the 'Things to come in biomedical publishing' section in the current issue and the 'Vital signs' section, which is for letters to the editor. If you have any views about the *TWS* changes just write and we will consider them and also publish them in the 'Vital signs' section. Filler boxes will still be used for miscellaneous topics.

One change has been made to merely improve appearances: the white space at the top of each page has been increased and set off with a small green square.

Now we are working towards decorating the pages with more pictures. I would be delighted to receive pictures of confusing/amusing signs, cartoons or photos relevant to writing, health, medicine, indeed any illustrations connected with our daily work will be most welcome.

Elise Langdon-Neuner

Editor-in-chief
editor@emwa.org