



## The EMWA Professional Development Programme: Credit where credit is due

by Stephen de Looze

In this article, I will respond to some questions and issues about the EMWA Professional Development Programme (EPDP) that were raised during conversations I had during the Ljubljana conference or made in the post-conference issue of *The Write Stuff* [1,2].

### Are workshop leaders paid by EMWA for their services?

As I mentioned in my report on the EPDP part of the recent EMWA satisfaction survey [3], workshop leaders are EMWA volunteers who do not receive payment from EMWA other than the standard reimbursement of travel and accommodation expenses according to EMWA's volunteer reimbursement policy. These services are no small contribution, and EMWA could not thrive as an association without them. Anyone who has run a workshop will know that the time required to conduct the workshop itself is only a small part of the overall workload. Preparation of workshop materials, pre-workshop assignments and post-workshop assignments, assessing assignments, corresponding with participants and providing feedback to participants and Head Office all require a considerable investment of time. Some workshop leaders run two or even three workshops at a single conference, and run workshops at both the spring and autumn conferences, which adds up to a very hefty workload indeed. All of this is done in the spirit of EMWA as an association where members help members in their professional development in all sorts of ways. Furthermore, the training provided by the workshop leaders—many of whom are professional trainers who would normally charge a substantial fee—is the best to be found anywhere, because EMWA workshop leaders are amongst the most accomplished professionals in the field. The approval and ongoing quality control of all workshops by leading medical writing professionals who are also EMWA volunteers (the EMWA Professional Development Committee, or EPDC) is unmatched by any commercial training organisation.

At this point I would like to express, on behalf of EMWA, my sincere gratitude towards our EPDP workshop leaders who are the lifeblood of every conference, and to the EPDC for its sterling work behind the scenes.

### Why is the maximum number of credit workshops that can be taken at any one conference limited to four?

When the EPDP was launched in 2000, EMWA did not place any restriction on booking credit workshops. The EPDC was, in those early days, still developing quality standards with a view to establishing an EPDP certificate that would be valued by employers and clients, and so be of

real benefit to members. One important factor in this was to ensure that the EPDP certificate would accompany at least two years' work experience. Of course the EPDC realised that some members enrolling in the programme may have this experience already. However, to screen members individually, assess and verify their experience, and establish a university-like 'admissions office' was far beyond Head Office resources, let alone those of the EMWA volunteers. Had it even been possible, it would have meant passing on the administrative costs to all members in the form of substantially higher EPDP registration fees.

The obvious way forward in the interests of most of the membership was to define a minimum number of workshop credits that would be needed to obtain a certificate, and ensure that this number required at least two years for a member to accumulate. One possibility would have been to continue unrestricted booking of credit workshops at any one conference but to set the number of credits required for a certificate at (nowadays) fifteen: with current conference sizes, six could theoretically be accumulated during each of two spring conferences, and three more at an autumn conference.

The immediate consequence of unrestricted booking in the first year of the EPDP was, however, that all credit workshop places were quickly filled by members who could book early. For many members, early booking is impossible because of tortuous approval procedures within their organisations. Another consequence of unrestricted booking was that some members underestimated the amount of time they would have to find, alongside their regular workload and other commitments, in order to complete up to six post-workshop assignments within six weeks of the conference. Some then missed the deadlines and thus did not receive credit. This was not fair on members who would have been able to attend a credit workshop and complete the assignment had there still been places available.

The EPDC therefore set the number of workshop credits needed for a certificate at eight but introduced the restriction of a maximum of four credit workshops per conference. This solved several problems at a stroke, has worked very well in practice ever since, and is the best arrangement for the great majority of members to ensure maximum choice even when registering later. To further increase flexibility of the certification programme, EMWA places no limit on the overall time required to complete a certificate, and members may complete foundation and advanced certificates simultaneously.

In order to address the view of some members, expressed in the *TWS* articles referenced above, that the EMWA arrange- ➤

## The EPDP

- ments inappropriately limit their choice when attending conferences, I would like to draw comparisons with past EMWA conferences, and with the present AMWA arrangements, since AMWA offers the only other comparable certification programme for medical writers. I must stress that by making the latter comparison, it is not my intention to criticise the AMWA conference or certification programme in any way, which has been developed and refined over many years to serve the interests of the AMWA membership. It is to put the issue of choice into perspective.

In 2000, EMWA was able to offer 24 workshops at the spring and autumn conferences combined. In 2001, this had increased to 28. This constituted the entire EPDP. These conferences provided no additional non-credit workshops, no seminars or forums, and had no Saturday morning sessions. Many EPDP registrants were able to find places on only two or three workshops per year to add to their credit records. By contrast, in 2008, EMWA offered around 90 events—credit and non-credit workshops, seminars and discussion forums—including almost 70 EPDP workshops<sup>1</sup>. In 2009, the numbers will slightly increase. The EPDP itself now comprises about 90 workshops (including new ones currently under development and not listed in the EPDP brochure from 2008), though not all can be presented at every conference without wearing out our workshop leaders!

The forthcoming AMWA conference in Dallas features 87 workshops (of which about 75 are for credit), and an additional 38 open sessions. In terms of number of events, the programme is thus about 30% bigger than EMWA's combined spring and autumn conferences, but attendance numbers at AMWA are expected to be over 900, or over 300% the size of EMWA's conferences. There are therefore fewer credit workshop places to go round per participant, though AMWA does host local chapter meetings and other smaller events where credits may be obtained. Furthermore, credit workshops at the annual conference are restricted to three per participant, the class sizes of credit workshops are smaller so the workshops fill more quickly, and in order to obtain a certificate, four workshops must be taken from a subset of 'general' workshops which are quickly fully booked. Eight workshops in total are required for a specialised certificate but ten are required for a multidisciplinary certificate. Enrolment in the advanced programme requires prior completion of the core programme (equivalent to EMWA's foundation level) unless five years' work experience can be proven. Certificates must be completed with six years (core) or eight years (advanced) of enrolling in the programme.

<sup>1</sup> A few of the EPDP workshops counted here were under assessment and not for credit. The quality of these workshops is expected to meet EPDP standards, but the 'under assessment' phase ensures that the quality of the EPDP is maintained. By offering these workshops at a discounted rate, members who want training but are not pursuing a certificate—about 50% of the membership is not EPDP-enrolled—are able to save money. By adding new workshops under assessment at almost every conference (which almost all become available for credit at the following conferences), the EPDP is continually expanding and providing more choice.

One comment in *TWS* [2] did rather alarm me, namely that being able to complete the EPDP certificate across two consecutive conferences would provide 'better value for money'. The implication here is that the chief reason for attending conferences is to obtain an EPDP certificate and that once this has been done, EMWA conferences would not be of much further use. While this may be true for a few members, the EMWA surveys have shown that most members attend workshops for the value of the training and networking itself, since about half are not enrolled in the EPDP. Even as Education Officer, I still hope that most members also attend EMWA conferences for the many other opportunities the conferences provide outside the EPDP.

### It is possible to transfer AMWA credits to EMWA?

The answer is no. As stated on page 6 of the EPDP brochure, "EMWA holds a spring and an autumn conference in different European cities each year. These are the only events where EPDP workshops are available for credit."

This issue affects only a very small number of EMWA members who are also AMWA members, but I was very surprised to see quite the opposite understanding during the Freelance Business Forum, i.e. that it was indeed possible to transfer AMWA credits to EMWA [1]. There are many reasons why such a transfer is not possible. The two associations have very differently structured certification programmes, with different options and different assignment of workshops to options. In addition, the format and content of the individual workshops are different (from EMWA's point of view, the most significant difference is that there are no post-workshop assignments in the AMWA format). There is no reciprocal assessment of workshop quality, or approval of workshop leaders between EMWA and AMWA. Even in the absence of these differences, any transfer arrangements would require close collaboration between the two associations so that any transferred credits would not be counted twice (what I believe is called 'double dipping' across the Atlantic!).

In this connection, it is worth recalling the origin of EMWA as an AMWA 'chapter', and its progression to an independent association [4]. Many European AMWA members found it difficult and very costly (more so in the days before bargain airfares) always to attend the once-yearly AMWA conference in the USA or Canada. Obtaining an AMWA certificate was uncertain because of the time limit for collecting credits, exacerbated by the fact that the 'general' workshops, four of which were required for a certificate, were often booked out even before the conference programme had made its way across the ocean (this was in the days before the Internet). The main driving force behind the creation of the European chapter, by me and the few other European AMWA members, was to be able to provide AMWA workshops at our European-based chapter meetings that would count towards an AMWA certificate.

After EMWA became an independent association we continued to host AMWA workshops run both by AMWA workshop leaders and by EMWA members who had volunteered to become workshop leaders. We were soon informed by AMWA Head Office that "consistent noncom-

pliance with [AMWA's] Guidelines caused us to make the decision to withdraw AMWA credit for our workshops presented at EMWA". The compliance issues included items such as not "sending a list of proposed workshops and leaders to AMWA for approval nine months in advance of a program", "determining that each workshop has the required AMWA evaluation forms and the required vouchers" and "placing a paid employee at the door of each of the core workshops to identify each registered participant." There were problems related to the approval status of European-based workshop leaders. A summary of AMWA's many objections, of which the above represent a small extract, was sent out to all EMWA members in a letter from Julia Cooper, the Education Officer at the time, on 12 April 2000.

Unfortunately, it was simply not possible for EMWA to address almost all of the objections raised by AMWA for logistical or economic reasons. At that point, many EMWA members were also AMWA members and were enrolled in the AMWA core curriculum on the assumption that they would have opportunities to complete the certificate in Europe. Up until then, the AMWA core curriculum was the only certification programme available. The withdrawal of AMWA credit for EMWA workshops marked, of course, the birth of our own EPDP. All EMWA members who were registered at that time for the AMWA core curriculum were asked if they wanted to stay with the AMWA programme or transfer to the EPDP. Almost everyone did transfer, and any AMWA credits they had gained towards a certificate up to that point were credited to the EPDP. However, this was a one-time opportunity, for the historical reasons I have outlined here, and transfer ceased when EMWA began providing EPDP workshops.

### The future?

A lot of this article is about the past, the origins of the EPDP and the relationship between EMWA and AMWA. I am delighted to have been invited to a panel discussion at this year's AMWA conference in Dallas on 'Globalisation of Medical Writing'. One of the panel topics will be 'A global professional medical writing organisation: has the time come?' I will be pleased to report back to EMWA the results of these discussions, and on the other topics to be addressed by the panel. With regard to EPDP certification, as I announced at this year's AGM in Ljubljana on my reelection as Education Officer, I will be exploring possible cooperation with academic establishments to expand the EPDP certificate (e.g. by including a dissertation or examinations) into a fully-fledged MSc or equivalent in medical writing.

### Stephen de Looze

EMWA Education Officer 2001–2003 and 2007–present  
Head of Medical Writing and Electronic Publishing  
Accovion GmbH, Eschborn, Germany  
stephen.delooze@accovion.com

### References:

1. Reeves, A. Hamilton S. Report on the Ljubljana Freelance Business Forum, May 2009. *TWS*, 18;2:135-136.
2. Reeves A. Cost of attending the Ljubljana conference. *TWS*, 18;2:139-143.
3. de Looze S. EMWA Member Satisfaction Survey: The details. *TWS* 18;1:39-41.
4. Hall G. The history of EMWA: Personal (and possibly unreliable) recollections. *TWS* 17;1:9-11

## The days are numbered for medical ghostwriting if Senator Grassley has his way

The US Senate Committee on Finance is currently investigating medical ghostwriting. Senator Charles Grassley, a member of the committee, is determined to put a stop to ghostwriting. He has found that universities are not taking sufficient responsibility in controlling their faculty members and are slow to investigate complaints of ghostwriting. The National Institutes of Health (N.I.H.), which issues grants for medical research, have also been slow to react and claim that responsibility lies with the universities. Attaching conditions to N.I.H. grants is seen by Senator Grassley as a powerful tool to force universities to take action and he is putting pressure on the N.I.H. to act accordingly.

The Senator has also asked 8 major American medical journals if they require the authors of the articles they publish to disclose associations with pharma companies, how these relationships are disclosed to the public, and whether the journals have taken action against any authors who have failed to disclose such a relationship.

Documents disclosed in the course of litigation against Wyeth show that articles written by DesignWrite that aimed to de-emphasise the risk of breast cancer associated with Wyeth's hormone replacement drugs were funded by Wyeth after research had been published that showed the risk of breast cancer and heart disease was increased in menopausal women who took the drugs. Some of these documents including a copy of a draft manuscript, emails between an 'author' and the company, and details of the ghostwriting budget can be read on *The New York Times* website. A published article acknowledged assistance with the article but did not reveal that two of the people acknowledged worked for Wyeth and the other two were employed by DesignWrite or indeed that DesignWrite charged Wyeth \$25,000 for writing the article.

Harlan Krumholz, one of the authors of a paper on guest authorship and ghostwriting in publications related to rofecoxib published in *JAMA*<sup>1</sup> last year, considers journals should aim for full disclosure of who is involved in drafting manuscripts and any person failing to do so should be banned from publishing in future. He is not opposed to even heavy assistance from medical writing companies provided their roles and the roles of third parties are fully disclosed.

### Sources:

<http://www.theheart.org/article/984881.do>  
[http://www.nytimes.com/2009/08/05/health/research/05ghost.html?\\_r=1&em](http://www.nytimes.com/2009/08/05/health/research/05ghost.html?_r=1&em)  
<http://documents.nytimes.com/design-write-medical-writing#p=1>

1. Ross JS, Hill KP, Egilman DS, Krumholz HM. Guest authorship and ghostwriting in publications related to rofecoxib: a case study of industry documents from rofecoxib litigation. *JAMA* 2008;299(15):1800-12