



The Editor's Red Pencil

by Barry Drees

Greetings fellow members,

This issue is the fourth since the format change and represents the end of the first full year of publication of *The Write Stuff* (TWS). I am very pleased to be able to report to you all that we were able to achieve our very ambitious goal of putting out a publication four times a year and I hope you'll agree with me that with the possible exception of some continuing, irritating printing problems, we now have a quality journal we can all be proud of. Although I'm the editor, I couldn't have done it without the help of the other members of the Editorial Board, the contributing authors, and all those who've written in with comments, suggestions or encouragement – thank you.

As I look back on the birth of the new EMWA journal, all I can say is, WOW, have I learned more than I ever thought I'd want to about printing, publishing, editing and proof-reading. There have been more than a few hiccups in the whole process, but all in all, I think it has functioned fairly well and I'm happy to see things are settling down and getting more routine with this issue. I don't want to suggest, however, that we can go over to cruise control or that there isn't still big room for improvement. I have a number of ideas, which I hope to implement this year for making things even better.

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Well, say what you want, but a different layout style every issue is never boring! Many of you may be a bit disappointed at the reduction in colour in this issue, I know I am. However, the sad fact is (and one of the many things I learned about printing this year) that using different colour text on each page was slowing down printing considerably while adding substantially to the cost. When I initially planned TWS, the printer told me that each additional colour added to the price. What I didn't realise was that changing the text on each page that needed to be done in the second colour was similar to using a different colour on each page, since a separate plate had to be prepared and a print run performed for each page where the coloured parts were different. This made me curious, and sure enough, most publications that are not full-colour restrict the use of colour to the front and back covers (check out the AMWA Journal, for example, which is strictly black and white). Thus, in order to be more timely and economical, I've restricted the green on the inside to the header and footers. I really don't think we've lost too much, and it will streamline printing.

Nothing warms the heart of an editor more than receiving a response from a reader. Therefore, I can't think of any better way to celebrate the first year of the new format than to be able to share with you some of the correspondence we have received. As I noted in the last issue, alternative medicine is both a current and controversial topic and sure enough, it generated our first real correspondence. Well, OK, we have received lots of letters from you saying how much you like the new format or pointing out yet another printing slip-up (Ugh), but this is the first time that we received something that actually addresses an issue in one of our articles. Naturally I'm thrilled to see that someone is actually reading and thinking about the things we print (rather than just hunting for errors) and I'm hopeful that we'll receive many more such responses in the future; maybe we can even generate a few long-running exchanges! We've chosen the title for our correspondence section (Vital Signs) to reflect that letters from the readers are proof positive that our 'patient' is still living.

With this issue we also initiate a number of exciting new series. Last year when I took over the position as editor and began thinking about topics, there were two which stood out in my mind as being particularly important for the journal: medical writing by non-native English speakers and freelance issues. It took a little cajoling but here we are with our first offerings in these series. Although many people consider medical writing to be an exclusive preserve of native English speakers, the reality in Europe is otherwise, as those of you who attend EMWA conferences will know. The non-native English speakers among us, however, tend to keep a fairly low profile (with the exception of Leen Vanherle) and so both to provide greater service to them and to inform those of us who are native speakers about their concerns, I am thrilled to present Hilde Joosen's piece. Freelance writers represent another important but somewhat neglected minority of the EMWA membership. In trying to make this journal of interest and relevance to all members, it's also very important to address their issues and thus we present an article from the AMWA Journal by Cathryn Evans which offers a sample freelance contract. This kind of really practical information is an important addition to the viewpoint and opinion pieces we usually run. And speaking of practical, we kick off our "Key Pharmaceutical Documents" series with a piece by Judi Proctor on the Patient Information Sheet featuring a checklist of information to be included which is used by an actual ethics committee.

Finally, this issue marks the long-awaited return of the notorious EMWA journal humour column. I won't presume that it will ever again reach the exalted heights (or was it depths) to which the legendary Keith Veitch, in the spirit of Monty Python and Benny Hill, brought this column in days of yore (who will ever forget the Medical Writer's exam or the half-baked advice column?), but I did feel that it was a tradition that just couldn't be denied. I hope you enjoy it and don't find it too offensive (that would be a break with tradition already), and submissions are, of course, more than welcome (and can be made anonymously).

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