

## **President's Annual Report: 1998-1999**

**By Gerold Wilson**

The year and a few months since the excellent conference held in Madrid, ably organised by Ben Young, has been one of the most significant periods in the history of EMWA. The Association has grown both in the size and breadth of its membership and has developed an organisation and structure to ensure continuing success in serving medical writers throughout Europe in the future.

**Structure:** During the year, the structure of EMWA has been re-ordered. Formerly EMWA had no legal basis, only a constitution. This was unsatisfactory in that members had no legal standing and there were problems with opening a bank account in many European countries (though not in the UK). After negotiating something of a legal maze, EMWA became incorporated as a company limited by guarantee. There are no shareholders or stockholders, but every member of EMWA is now a member of the company. The company cannot pay dividends to members and no-one can profit from the company. The company can make money from bank investments for the general good without any individual such as the treasurer being liable for the tax.

By establishing EMWA as a legal entity in its own right we have helped to secure stability into the future. The main part of the constitution, incorporated in the memorandum and articles of association, is legally binding. We have to stick to rules. The annual business meeting at the conference becomes the annual general meeting of the company and is sovereign. The committee are “the board of directors” of the company and responsible to the AGM. Everyday issues can be dealt with informally.

**Administration:** An important step in the more professional management of EMWA which occurred in Barry Drees’ year as President was the appointment in October 1997 of an administrator/secretariat in the person of Phillipa Clow. With the location of the secretariat in the UK it made sense for the bank account to be located in the UK also. The EMWA bank account for several years was a personal account of the treasurer held in Switzerland. A new bank account was opened on 20 March 1998, all funds transferred from Switzerland and the previous account was closed on 6 August 1998. We should record thanks to Phillipa and to treasurer Barbara Grossman for their efforts in this area.

**Education:** The conference is the main educational event of the year and we are indebted to Julia Cooper for her hard work in organising a broader and more extensive programme for Copenhagen than we have ever attempted before. Julia has also played a part in our continuing contacts with the American Medical Writers Association and dealt with many of the difficulties which appear inherent in this relationship. Although there has been no progress in establishing academic links with a university or other institution for a masters programme, we have moved towards establishing EMWA accreditation of its own programmes.

Executive Committee proposed establishing an EMWA continuing education scheme along similar lines to the AMWA Core Curriculum. The details of the scheme will be as follows:

- The EMWA continuing education scheme will require completion of workshops (with homework) on a range of subjects. This will include workshops on topics relevant to medical writing in Europe as well as topics similar to the AMWA core curriculum.
- Any workshop credits obtained as part of the AMWA core curriculum will be recognised under the EMWA scheme.
- Workshop leaders will be appointed by an EMWA education committee. The composition of this committee was discussed at the AGM. This committee will also have the power to give the EMWA stamp of approval to trainee writer schemes run by other organisations.

The Executive Committee feel that it is time to set up a medical writing education scheme within Europe, to meet the needs of European writers and enable members to obtain accreditation by attending workshops in Europe. We now have sufficient workshop leaders within EMWA to get such a course off the ground. If we obtain a mandate from the membership, we could get things moving in time for a one-day meeting planned for later this year. Neither the annual conference nor smaller meetings would be possible without the contributions of speakers and workshop leaders who give freely of their time and great expertise. EMWA and its members are in their debt.

**Links with other organisations:** Keynote speaker in Madrid was the deputy editor of the Lancet, Dr David Sharp. This was a useful meeting because of David's role in EASE (European Association of Science Editors). We have subsequently discussed a reciprocal arrangement whereby EMWA and EASE members can attend each other's meetings at member rates. The next major EASE meeting is in Tours in May next year. We have also initiated discussions with AMWA (Australia) and DIA along similar lines.

**Press and public relations:** David Sharp also helped raise awareness of EMWA by commenting on the Association in a Lancet leading article. Not all EMWA members would have been in agreement with every thought expressed and several of David's points were answered in correspondence. Our PR officer, Jane Stock, reports that EMWA has, in addition to the Lancet reference, been mentioned in BrAPP newsletters and ACRPI newsletters. It has not been feasible to extend PR activity into other areas of medical writing such as communications agencies until our conference supported these types of writing more. Agencies appear interested, and many use our website, and so following the Copenhagen conference it may be possible to spread the PR net wider.

**Membership communication:** It has been the overriding concern of the Executive Committee throughout the year to provide our members with value for money. Two significant ways in which this has been done have been the launch of EMWA's magazine as *The Write Stuff* and the continuing excellence of the EMWA website. Our thanks go to Barry Drees and Marian Hodges for the really great effort and work that they have put into these important parts of the Association's activity.

**Membership:** In August 1998 paid-up membership was 161 members, 141 of whom were also AMWA members. There may also have been a number of people who had not paid membership at that time and we estimate that these people would have taken our operational membership at that time to about 190.

Less than one year later, Phillipa Clow and our former membership officer Debbie Jordan reported that we currently have 261 members of whom 141 are AMWA members. EMWA members reside in 19 countries, Austria, Belgium, Denmark, England, France, Germany, Iceland, India, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Singapore, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Scotland and USA. The harmonisation of membership invoicing to 30 June 1999 was very successful and there are now only a handful of members to remind. Membership has grown mostly through personal contacts and will continue to grow if members resolve not to keep EMWA a secret. It is very important to spread awareness of EMWA, if only by pointing colleagues and acquaintances to the website. There will be plenty of spare copies of the programme for next year's conference, which can be sent to anyone that any member suggests.

**Sponsorship:** Finally, to sponsorship. We must record our gratitude to those commercial organisations which support EMWA and in particular to those involved in the conference. Novo Nordisk's sponsorship of the Copenhagen conference has extended beyond finance in the persons of Mary Ryan and Susanne Wedderkopp who have contributed so much to the organisation of the conference on the ground and in sorting out everything from the hotels to meeting rooms. Our special thanks goes to them.

Sponsorship is very important for EMWA and is rather static at the moment. For the pharmaceutical industry, in particular, sponsorship and support of EMWA represents excellent value for money. Any comparison between the costs and content of an EMWA meeting and similar commercial conferences bears this out. In terms of education of medical writers, EMWA is really the only game in town. Our problem is that, while the industry as a whole may appreciate the value of the service which EMWA performs, individual companies may take some persuading that they should dip into their own corporate pockets. A major sponsor is still needed for next year's conference, and continuing patrons are being sought. Everyone can help by pinpointing the key individuals in companies who could consider sponsorship.

### ***Department of Corrections – Winter 1998/99***

The first paragraph on page 17 of the article "The Future of Medical and Technical Writing" by Stephen de Looze had two lines deleted prior to printing. The correct text should read,

*"There is a well-known Chinese saying about the journey of a thousand miles beginning with a single step. What the saying does not describe is what happens if your single step is in the wrong direction. If you are five hundred miles down the wrong road before you notice it, you are in big trouble, at least as far as deadlines are concerned!"*

The official name of the publication of the Australian Medical Writers Association is AMWA News and not the AuMWA Journal as stated in "The Editor's Red Pencil" on page 3.