



Message from the President

by Keith Veitch

One of the things which distinguished EMWA from AMWA when we were still joined at the hip was the different membership profiles of the two organisations. The members of AMWA come from a wider variety professional backgrounds, including science writers, medical writers, journalists, editors and medical practitioners, while EMWA is dominated by those who write within the pharmaceutical industry for the industry and the regulatory authorities. This may explain why I find the word professional to be appropriate in the context of the European Professional Development Programme (EPDP), for those who have attended AMWA conferences will be aware that quite a few of the workshops on offer have little to do with our profession. When attending an AMWA discussion group on Journal Writing I was relieved to find out that I was not the only one to be disappointed upon learning that it concerned keeping a diary!

Anyway, having made my plug for the EPDP I want to note that for me, the main difference between AMWA and EMWA is that one is a North American organisation, and the USA, despite the increase in Spanish, is still a one language nation, while EMWA covers that patchwork of countries called Europe (apologies to those members from farther afield, I am generalising as usual) with a patchwork of languages. The European Union is a phrase which is frequently used in a derogative sense because there often appears to be little “union” between the constituents, but membership of organisations such as the European Agency for the Evaluation of Medicinal Products (EMA) does unite us in the use of English as a lingua franca (and that phrase is a good example of what a mix the English language is!). Common regulatory submissions from multi-national pharmaceutical companies located in different sites across the continent, communicating electronically over the Internet or private Intranets is breaking down the language barriers and, some may say, forcing English down the throats of many.

As a writer I am privileged to be able to practice my profession in my mother tongue, English (although those who know that I am a Geordie from Newcastle upon Tyne may raise an eyebrow at that statement). And even though I work in a country with three different official languages, the working language is English. However, many of our members are not so fortunate. As well as the common problems of getting statisticians to talk in a language ordinary human beings can understand, while at the same time trying to simplify things sufficiently that their

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bosses can understand, they have the additional burden of coping with English as a foreign language. In EMWA we consider one our main roles is to provide whatever assistance is necessary or required by non-English native speaking members, as shown by the focus of this issue of The Write Stuff. To do so we need input, so if you consider that you have something to offer non-native speakers, or if you need help with any aspect of English as a foreign language please let us know. We wish to develop this aspect of EMWA, and the EPDP, so that we truly are a European organisation representing and providing for everyone. It has been said that the USA and the UK are two nations divided by a common tongue – our responsibility is to ensure that EMWA is truly united by a common tongue.

And finally... Barry suggested that if I did not want to discuss linguistic diversity I could write about pharmaceutical corporate mergers, the meaning of life or the parlous state of the English and German football teams. Well, on the latter subject I would just like to say to our Portuguese and Romanian members (do we have any?) that the best teams won the day and no hard feelings, and to my German colleagues, eins zu null!

Keith Veitch
R&D Management (B.60/H315)
SmithKline Beecham Biologicals
Rue de L'Institut 89
B-1330 Rixensart, Belgium
Tel: (+32) 2 656 9632 Fax: (+32) 2 656 8113
keith.veitch@sbbio.be

NEWSFLASH:

The Write Stuff enters the Citation Index

Yes, The Write Stuff has finally entered the BIG TIME – we've been cited! An article in the European Society for Regulatory Affairs journal, the ESRA Rappoteur (July/August 2000, pages 5-8), entitled "Medical writing in regulatory affairs: improving the quality of reporting and electronic media challenges" by Paolo M. Biffignandi makes two references to TWS! One reference is to the article "Medical Writing in the Old World" from 1999; 8 (3): 8-9 and the other, believe it or not, is to "The Lighter Side: what they really mean" from 1999; 8 (4): 21. Good to see that one thing EMWA gets noted for is a sense of humour.