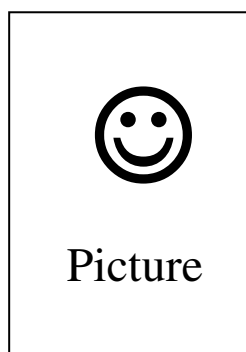




In the Spotlight...



Allan Johnson
Copy Writer
PBC Communications, Marlow,
Bucks, UK



Nationality: British

Native language: English

Languages spoken fluently: Just English

Type of medical writing: CRO - Communications agency

How many years as a medical writer: 3.5

What qualities do you think a medical writer must/should have? An eye for detail. I am still appalled to find typographical errors in main headings and key drug names spelled incorrectly. Other qualities? A good sense of humour is a must.

What keeps you doing medical writing? That's an interesting question, as I have just moved away from being a 'Medical Writer' to become a 'Copy Writer'. I was afraid that I wouldn't find a science-based writing job if I changed from writing 'science' to writing advertisements and GP-orientated documents. I couldn't have been more wrong.

What was your worst mistake as a writer and what did you learn from it? Worst mistake was probably trying to correct too many edits on a protocol without the paperwork to support decisions made by a client. It all went horribly wrong, and it taught me the importance of keeping exact notes of client-agreed requirements and edits.

What is your most/least favourite type of document to work on and why? My favourite types of document were regulatory documents involving Phase I or pharmacology. Now, having moved into medical communications, I'm enjoying producing many new types of documents, most of which are based on pharmacology and precise science. I think my least favourite documents were those Phase II/III clinical studies that report drugs, which simply did not have any notable efficacy. I don't know what is more demoralising, writing about a drug that doesn't work, or knowing that the client isn't that bothered about the report because the trial didn't 'work'.

If you could change one thing in your job as a MW, what would it be? Probably raising the profile of the writer, so that others in the industry could understand what is done and the processes involved; i.e., that it is not simply a matter of knocking out 50+ pages of text.

Do you consider yourself foremost a writer or a scientist, and why? This is a good question. I am scientifically trained, and have considered myself a scientist before anything else for many years. Now, I'm not too sure. I don't think you can

be a good scientific writer without being part scientist and part writer; however, I'm sure that exceptions do exist

How important (e.g. for one's perception of medical writing, training, personal development, networking...) are professional organisations to you (EMWA, AMWA, EASE, DIA, etc)? Professional organisations are very important in ensuring that you're aware that there is someone else out there with the same issues and problems. All too often the writer is locked away, manacled to a PC. It can be a solitary life, and professional organisations help keep our feet on the ground.

What was the funniest/oddest/most interesting job you ever did? I think the most interesting job I ever did was writing a protocol involving intra-ocular surgery. The advisory team was high-powered and global, and it was fun interacting with so many people with such diverse specialities.

What do you consider your greatest achievement? I received a PhD in pharmacology in 1997, I'm yet to top that one professionally.

What is your most pressing unfulfilled goal in life? I've just finished writing my first novel. Once it is in a presentable format, it would be very satisfying to see it published.

What are your hobbies? Generally writing and editing my novel, it seems to involve more time and lengthier edits than any study report I have ever worked on.

Is there anything else about EMWA or Medical Writing that you would like to comment on? EMWA produce informative, fun conferences, which I would recommend attending if the opportunity arises.

Media Item of Interest

The IOF-Alliance Osteoporosis Media Award, sponsored by the International Osteoporosis Foundation (IOF) and *The Alliance for Better Bone Health* (Aventis Pharma and Procter & Gamble Pharmaceuticals), will honour journalists who write imaginative and effective articles about the disease. Speaking at the launch of the award on World Osteoporosis Day, IOF Executive Director Mary Anderson explained that the award encourages journalists to communicate the importance of prevention, early detection, and rapid treatment of osteoporosis.

Awards will be given to journalists writing for general press and medical publications. First prizes include a \$5,000 cash award, all-expense paid trips to the World Osteoporosis Day 2001 press conference where the 2001 award ceremony will be held, and to the May 10-14, 2002 World Congress on Osteoporosis in Lisbon, Portugal. Articles must be published between July 1, 2000 and June 30, 2001. Articles are invited from journalists worldwide, and can be submitted in any language. Each article must be accompanied by a one to two paragraph English summary.

Entry forms and more details can be obtained through the IOF website at www.osteofound.org, or by contacting Alexandra Galvan, Tel: +33 4 72 91 41 77; Fax: +33 4 72 36 90 52; email: alexandra@ioflyon.org.