



Message from the President . . .

by Keith Veitch

When people hear that I am a medical writer their curiosity is aroused until I explain to them my role within a pharmaceutical company. I can see them then mentally dismissing me as someone who spends all day in front of a word processor writing dry, boring pieces of a technical nature for equally dry and boring scientific/medical types to read. And when I reflect, it is almost true, but does miss out on one of the major parts of the job which is the theme of this issue – dealing with other people. We all have to deal with other people in our daily lives, at home, shopping, travelling, etc., but I am willing to bet that most of the conflict in our lives comes from having to deal with those for whom we work, or who work with or for us (something difficult to define at times!). These interactions can be broadly divided into two kinds depending on whether you are freelance or “corporate”.

The image that “freelance medical writer” usually conjures up is of someone sitting alone in their home office with piles of data or material from their clients, churning out text and tables from their PC and e-mailing it back for approval. A solitary, isolated existence which some may find appealing . . . but not reality. The drawback is that you must deal with a client who is going to pay your bills. A freelancer must create and develop a relationship with prospective clients during the first contact, which evolves such that subsequent work follows. If you want to be successful, you must ensure that the process of writing is not a solitary one, but involves interaction and feedback to satisfy both yourself and your client. Hopefully, after reading some of the articles in this issue, you will have a better idea of how to create this state of nirvana.

For the rest of us, as Diana Klein-Franke points out, working within the pharmaceutical industry, the catchword is “teamwork”. As a writer, you are not only the person who ensures that the correct words are put down on the piece of paper, but a member of a team responsible for selecting the appropriate words and making sure they appear in the right form, with the right emphasis and at the right time. A writer who wants to sit in their garret to produce their block-busting novel is not suitable for the role of writer in a team where every sentence and word is subjected to multiple scrutiny and a variety of possible alterations. Accepting that you are only a cog in the wheel is an important part of being successful in this environment. To be able to stand to one side while your lovingly crafted prose is torn to shreds is essential. Of course you have the satisfaction of knowing that you are the most important cog, which is why it is always the writer’s fault when a deadline is not met . . .

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. . . and from the Vice-president

by Julia Forjanic Klapproth

Preparations are underway for next spring's conference in Montpellier and I thought I would take this opportunity to send an open invitation to everyone to join us there.

For many people Montpellier is considered the most beautiful city in France. Nestled on the coast of the Mediterranean, Montpellier is the capital of Languedoc-Roussillon, a region in southern France famous for its wine and culture. It is a lively university city with a charming atmosphere and streets full of cafés and student bars in the midst of impressive squares and parks (and the entire city centre is a pedestrian-only zone!).

As a dynamic university town, Montpellier's cultural richness owes much to the student community. There are many small theatres and music clubs, and the remarkable Opera-Berlioz is a must see for opera fans. Several museums bring to light the town's rich history, and there are a number of different festivals held in Montpellier that count among the most important in France.

Situated between Provence, the Camargue, the Cevennes mountains and the Pyrenees, Montpellier offers a wide range of opportunities for excursions into some of the most romantic and famous areas of France. For instance, you could take a trip to the mountain villages in the Cevennes, which for a long time were inaccessible. Or visit Nimes, Avignon and the famous Pont du Gard, a Roman aquaduct more than 2000 years old. The Camargue is a nature reserve that offers excellent opportunities for horse riding and uncrowded, sandy beaches and sand dunes.

Tempted yet?

Well, if that isn't enough, there will also be a savoury selection of workshops that Julia Cooper and the EPDP are cooking up for you to further your medical writing skills. Plus there will be some tantalising speakers from different corners of the medical writing landscape.

When you aren't busy enhancing your skills as a medical writer, our social programme promises to keep you busy elsewhere. There will be a wine tasting, a walking tour of the medieval city, a concert in a cathedral and a tour of the oldest medical school in Europe. Plus, the banquet will be in a nearby wine-making chateau, hosted by the count and countess themselves.

So mark May 8 – 11, 2001 in your calendars. I am looking forward to sipping a hearty wine and contemplating life as a medical writer with you in the sunshine of Montpellier.

À bientôt,

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