

Medical writing in Australia

By Peter Tobin

G'day from Australia. I have recently returned from the 2006 Annual European Medical Writers Association (EMWA) conference in Lyon, stuffed full of new and exciting ideas on publication planning, strategy, and some practical tips on how to improve my writing. In return for some invaluable advice, I would like to provide a short report on medical writing in Australia and one of our key educational bodies, the Association of Regulatory and Clinical Scientists (ARCS).

Although, medical writing is not as firmly established in Australia as it is in Europe, there is *increasing demand for 'good' medical writers*. By 'good', I mean writers that are technically proficient and aware of relevant guidelines, some of which are listed below [1-3]. However, I believe that being a 'good' medical writer also involves a commitment to upholding the principles of transparency and honesty in reporting research that are embodied in these guidelines. For example, it is often overlooked that potential conflicts of interest can introduce bias into studies and it is therefore critical that readers are aware of these so that they can objectively assess reported studies.

ARCS is one of the key educational bodies in Australia and New Zealand that is helping to develop young medical writers like myself and ensure that the medical writing industry within Australia is a professional and highly ethical industry. ARCS Australia is a not-for-profit association with approximately 2200 members throughout Australia and New Zealand, in a wide range of fields including medical writing, regulatory affairs, clinical research, health economics, medical devices, and the provision of medical information (www.arcs.com.au). Each of these disciplines has an education subcommittee that meets regularly to exchange information, to discuss the changing healthcare environment in Australia, and to arrange educational seminars.

I am a member of the ARCS Medical Writing Education Subcommittee. This group currently consists of 54 active members, predominantly from multi-national pharmaceutical companies and contract research organizations specializing in medical writing. This year our group has organised seminars on: the interactions between medical writers and statisticians; systematic reviews and meta-analyses; and information on medical writing for those who are new to this field or interested in entering the medical writing arena. The high attendance at these seminars is an indication of the level of interest in medical writing in Australia.

As well as being instrumental in shaping the medical writing industry, ARCS also provides a *social forum for medical writers*. In a large country like Australia this fills a critical need for an often-overlooked area: networking. I have found that often the most valuable information is obtained in informal settings, by just chatting to other medical writers (don't underestimate the value of new ideas over beers). If nothing else, it has helped me appreciate that the difficulties and challenges I face are shared by other medical writers in Australia. And certainly the EMWA conference in Lyon highlighted to me that my European colleagues share these challenges as well.

In conclusion, Australia offers great opportunities for medical writers, both in terms of contract and full-time employment. ARCS has helped create a well-informed and close-knit community of medical writers within Australia. In this way ARCS performs a similar role in Australia to that provided by EMWA in Europe. I believe that future collaborations between ARCS and EMWA would be of great benefit to both associations.

Affiliations and competing interests

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2. Wager E, Field EA, Grossman L. Good publication practice for pharmaceutical companies. *Curr Med Res Opin* 2003; 19(30): 149-54.
3. Jacobs A, Wager E. European Medical Writers Association (EMWA) guidelines on the role of medical writers in developing peer-reviewed publications. *Curr Med Res Opin* 2005; 21: 317-322.

Disclaimer statement

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Worth reading

'Ethical writing should be taught', a commentary by Miguel Roig. *BMJ* 2006;333:596-7.