

Results of the 2006 EMWA Salary Survey

by Kelly Goodwin Burri

The first ever EMWA salary survey was announced at the annual conference in Lyon this past spring. The purpose of the survey was to obtain data regarding the salaries of biomedical communicators for EMWA members. In addition to salary information, we also collected data on other factors that typically influence income levels, such as education, work experience, and type of employer. For the purpose of the survey, we defined a salaried employee as anyone employed by a company, institution, or individual and paid a salary or hourly wage. To open the survey, an email announcement was sent to all EMWA members after the Lyon conference providing information about the survey and a link to the online survey site. EMWA members meeting the definition of a salaried employee could participate in the survey between 6 June and 4 July 2006.

We had 230 respondents take part in the salary survey. Although not all respondents provided answers to all the survey questions, 208 provided usable data regarding their annual income and 180 included the country in which they primarily worked. Most respondents were located in the United Kingdom (75 responses), followed by Germany (46), and France (15). Responses were not limited to those working in Europe—medical writers in Japan, Singapore, South Africa and the USA also took time out to complete the survey. All salaries reported in non-Euro currencies were converted to Euros using the exchange rate from the day the survey closed (4 July 2006) as listed on the website www.oanda.com. This was necessary for about half of the respondents (primarily for those in the UK and working outside of Europe).

The majority of respondents were women (69.9%), had earned advanced degrees (61.2%) in the life sciences (71.4%), and had 2 to 5 years of relevant work experience (40.4%). Most worked for companies with more than 500 employees (66.8%), and the most common types of employers were pharmaceutical or biotech companies (52.9%) and contract research organizations (30.7%). More than 90% of respondents were employed full-time and the majority described their job title as medical writer (85.9%). Accordingly, most respondents spent the majority (one-half to three-quarters) of their time writing (42%); additional activities were fairly evenly distributed among the tasks editing, proof-reading, quality control, electronic publishing, supervision or administration, and training.

The average annual income of all respondents was €54,924 (median €50,000). However, there were relatively large variations in income depending on the respondent's amount of relevant work experience, type of employer, level of responsibility, and country or region of primary employment. Overall, men tended to earn more than women; the average annual income of the 58 male respondents was €65,625 (median €59,359), while the 145 female respondents reported an average income of €51,064 (median €48,000). This held true at all employment levels, with the largest difference between men and women evident with starting salaries. Entry level salaries averaged €51,986 for men and €35,915 for women, a difference of almost 45%.

The amount of work experience seemed to influence income levels more than the highest educational degree earned (Table 1). Exceptions to this were with entry level salaries (< 2 years' experience) and those with more than 15 years of work experience. Respondents with advanced degrees reported regular increases in salary with increasing work experience. The results were not so straight forward for respondents whose highest earned degree was a Bachelors or Masters degree; those with more than 15 years' experience were earning less than their colleagues in the 11-15 years' experience category. Medical writers just starting out (most respondents reported working in the field for 5 years or less) can expect to see increasing salaries as they build up more work experience.

Table 1: Income based on education and years of experience

Years' Experience	Bachelors or Masters Degree		Advanced Degree	
	Number of Responses	Mean Income (€)	Number of Responses	Mean Income (€)
< 2	18	38,142	25	46,195
2-5	30	49,448	54	50,483
6-10	14	54,985	28	59,390
11-15	7	82,038	13	74,634
> 15	8	60,366	10	86,986

Pharmaceutical or biotech companies employed the highest number of respondents in this survey and were also paying the highest salaries (Table 2). Communications and advertising agencies provided the second highest average compensation.

Table 2: Income by type of employer

Type of Employer	Number of Responses	Annual Income (€)		
		Mean	S.D.	Median
Pharmaceutical or biotech company	106	63,645	25,093	57,719
Communications or advertising agency	17	55,544	22,784	48,000
Contract research organization	67	43,235	14,797	41,414
Company offering medical writing services	6	42,211	8,468	41,125
Other*	12	48,631	16,438	44,423
All	208	54,924	23,143	50,000

*Category "Other" includes results with less than 5 responses: Academic, Charity, Consultancy, Government body, Hospital, Medical device company, Medical education company, Medical journal.

Increasing job responsibilities also clearly translated to higher salaries (Table 3). Respondents in senior level positions with management responsibilities reported earning more than double that of entry level medical writers. It is also interesting to note that men in the most senior level positions are earning approximately 30% more than their female counterparts (€100,500 versus €80,194).

Table 3: Income by employment level and supervisory or management role

Employment Level	Number of Responses	Annual Income (€)		
		Mean	S.D.	Median
Entry level	27	40,082	11,409	36,796
Middle				
No supervisory responsibilities	77	47,526	12,572	46,514
Supervisory responsibilities	29	52,406	16,687	50,000
Senior				
No management responsibilities	47	57,240	16,446	55,300
With management responsibilities	28	88,303	35,193	85,156

The highest average salaries were reported by respondents working in Switzerland, Scandinavia (results from Denmark, Finland and Sweden were pooled), and Germany (Table 4). No attempt was made to adjust the reported incomes with respect to the cost of living in the given country or region. Anyone now ready to move to Switzerland to work, be warned—it's not a cheap place to live!

Table 4: Income by country or geographic region

Country or Geographic Region	Number of Responses	Annual Income (€)		
		Mean	S.D.	Median
Switzerland	8	81,295	41,884	68,446
Denmark, Finland, & Sweden	13	61,336	14,306	60,327
Germany	46	60,486	20,440	56,450
France	15	55,477	33,151	47,000
Belgium	7	49,863	10,941	49,000
UK & Ireland	77	49,070	17,055	43,289
The Netherlands	5	43,931	14,610	39,295
All*	180	54,371	22,616	50,000

*Less than 5 responses each received from Japan, Singapore, Spain, South Africa, and USA; these data were only included in the overall tabulation.

Overall, job satisfaction was high among the survey participants. More than three-quarters of respondents were satis-

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fied with their current work (78.9%). Fewer were satisfied with their salary (57.7%), but that is still more than half of all respondents that were not complaining. Here's hoping that the rest who are not satisfied with their current salary will be able to use the survey results to make a case for a well-deserved rise!

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The human side of editing a journal

Over the years that I worked as a managing editor I collected the 'human' phrases that popped up in exchanges with authors. Here is a small selection.

Editorial office question: "Please confirm that Prof X has consented to the quote of the personal communication".

Author answer: "I am certain that he will agree to my published attribution. He has such an ego, he will be flattered".

Fortunately there are some authors who accept suggested corrections.

Editorial office: "The adverb 'likely' should not stand alone. Either it should be qualified or another word substituted".

Author answer: "I think we can substitute 'likely' with 'possible'. Do not exitate to re-contact me if there will be any other problems".

Editorial office: "This is an unhappy sentence. Could you please rephrase..."

Author answer: "I like the concept of an unhappy sentence. It suggests possibilities of a semi-colon-leading to intestinal misery or of a hypoglycaemic comma or perhaps a terminal full stop as a result of syntactical suicide".

One of the hardest tasks is to solicit reviewers. A rare reply from a Greek reviewer to a request to review a manuscript: "I would like to thank you for the honor to be selected as a reviewer of your prestigious journal."

Another reply to a request to review: "I cannot review this paper which is totally out of my field of expertise. I do not even know what an 'otoacoustic emission' is.

A non-native English reviewer's comment to a non-native author: "The authors have to check spelling and grammar at many places. Titer is always spelt wrongly as titter throughout the manuscript".

There are even authors who appreciate your hard work: "I wish to thank you for your great task to edit our paper" (Japan).

And short and sweet: "You are an absolute angel!!!!"

If anyone has any examples of similar exchanges with authors I would be delighted to hear from you.

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