September 11: Dinner Meeting in Newton, Mass.

Differentiating Yourself in the Employment Market: Certificates, Certifications, and University Degrees for Medical Communicators

Join your New England AMWA colleagues on Wednesday, September 11, for a dinner program focused on opportunities to enhance your professional versatility and make you even more valuable in the workplace! Our first meeting of the 2013-14 season will provide information about various programs that offer professional certificates, certification, and university degrees of interest to medical communicators (and to those who use our services). What are these programs and how can they add value to your toolbox? What credentials can differentiate you from your peers, and which are less likely to benefit your career goals?

Jill Shuman, a certified Editor in the Life Sciences (ELS) and a Certified CME Professional (CCMEP), will discuss the plethora of educational options available to medical writers and editors. Jill has led roundtable discussions on this topic and has extensive knowledge of the current education and certification market for medical communicators. She is an AMWA fellow and a former New England Chapter president.

Following dinner, Jill will provide an overview of the various certification/credentialing programs (such as ELS, CCMEP, and RAC, among others) as well as the myriad certificate programs and university-based degrees for medical communicators. Learn about the best ways to fill in the gaps in your education and experience, and get the latest information on the progress of AMWA’s certification initiative.

This meeting is sure to be of interest whether you’re a newcomer trying to break in to the field or a seasoned medical writer who wants to reevaluate your skills. Come make new acquaintances, mingle with friendly colleagues, enjoy a meal at an Irish pub, and learn ways to enhance your marketability as a medical communicator.

Space in our private room at Mick Morgan’s is limited. If you sign up early, you’ll be assured of a seat—and a 20% savings on the registration fee as well!

As always, guests and prospective members are welcome.

—Theresa Singleton
President-Elect/Program Director
Chapter Calendar

The New England Chapter’s year begins in mid-June, when the new slate of officers takes over. The officers and other members of the chapter’s Executive Council meet during the summer, but there are no general activities during July and August.

Regular Meetings: The chapter holds six regular meetings from September through June. Four of these meetings are in the Greater Boston area, and two are in Connecticut. Typically, these meetings start with a social hour, followed by dinner (except for a Sunday brunch in midwinter), then a program with a speaker, a panel presentation, or roundtable discussions.

Special Events: In addition to the regular meetings, the chapter holds one special event each year. A writing competition, culminating in presentation of the Will Solimene Awards for Excellence in Medical Communication, is held every other year. In the alternate years, the chapter holds the New England Conference, a full day of workshops on a Saturday in the spring.

Occasional Extras: Once in a while, the chapter schedules an informal event, such as a networking lunch or a guided tour.

On the Calendar: Save the Dates

November 7 - Informal Dinner
AMWA Annual Conference, Columbus, Ohio
At this year’s national meeting, New England attendees will have a chance to meet up at the “Chapter Greet & Go” on Thursday, November 7, and then head out to dinner as a group. Sue Chow will make arrangements at a nearby restaurant and will let everyone know what the specific plans are via the AMWA New England E-News.

December 3 - Dinner Meeting
Newton, Mass.
Learn all the ins and outs of self-publishing on Tuesday, December 3, at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in Newton, Mass. The next issue of New England Chapter News will give details.

And There’s More to Come . . .

The Connecticut Program Committee, headed by Jill Max, vice president/Connecticut, is planning a dinner meeting in New Haven in October. Everyone will be invited!

Watch the AMWA New England E-News for information about the chapter's next informal networking lunch, hosted by Francesca CoItrera and Andrea Gwosdow at Changsho in Cambridge, Mass. And keep an eye out for details about another informal chapter get-together in a new format: an after-work meetup in Cambridge or Boston, hosted by Kristin Stephan.

In February, the chapter's traditional midwinter Sunday brunch in the Greater Boston area will feature the always popular roundtable discussions on career-related topics. If you have any topic suggestions, contact Theresa Singleton, president-elect, at theresasingleton@hotmail.com.

Other Meetings in New England

September 17
Editorial Freelancers Association
The Boston Chapter of EFA will meet at the Cambridge Brewing Company, Cambridge, Mass., 6:30-8:00 p.m. For information, contact chap_boston@the-efa.org.

September 28-October 2
Regulatory Affairs Professionals Society
“2013 RAPS: The Regulatory Convergence” will be held at the Hynes Convention Center in Boston. For information, go to: www.raps.org.

November 2-6
American Public Health Association
APHA is holding its 2013 annual meeting and exposition at the Boston Convention and Exhibition Center. For information, go to: www.apha.org/meetings/AnnualMeeting/.
May Meeting Report

McDRA: A Standardized International Terminology

The cozy banquet room at Kudeta in downtown New Haven was lively as frequent attendees and newcomers mingled during the social hour before dinner. Attendees came from varied backgrounds, some having considerable experience, others hoping to learn more about the medical writing field. After enjoying a variety of Asian dishes, the group quieted down to learn about McDRA from Judy E. Harrison, MD, an independent clinical consultant and senior medical officer of the McDRA Maintenance and Support Services Organization.

For those unfamiliar with McDRA (Medical Dictionary for Regulatory Activities), she began by explaining that it is a standardized international terminology used by regulatory authorities and the pharmaceutical industry to share safety information about medicinal products. Its main purpose, she said, was to reduce redundancy.

Dr. Harrison described in detail the benefits and uses of McDRA, specifically for medical writers. She pointed out the tremendous value of this terminology on an international scale, as each term is assigned a code that corresponds to identical terms in eleven languages.

Dr. Harrison walked us through the McDRA hierarchy of terms, even conducting a browser demonstration on her laptop. She explained the various levels, from the lowest level term to the system organ class, showing the options of terms at each level.

After giving us this overview, she showed us how to use McDRA for data retrieval purposes. After demonstrating how to create a query, she went on to discuss Standardized McDRA Queries (SMQs), which are data retrieval tools for pharmacovigilance. She pointed out both the benefits and limitations of SMQs while providing examples of their use in clinical trials and post-marketing surveillance.

Because McDRA has become the de facto standard at the FDA, Dr. Harrison’s talk provided a useful introduction to a terminology that many medical writers use daily. Her presentation highlighted the key attributes of McDRA as well as important aspects of using the browser for medical writing. Those wishing to learn more can visit the McDRA website (http://www.meddrasso.com).

—Teresa Horan

Teresa Horan, daughter of AMWA member Michelle Horan, is a junior at St. Mary’s College of Maryland. She hopes to become a physician.

June Meeting Report

Writing an Engaging Medical Narrative

The chapter’s last meeting of the year, a dinner at Papa Razzi in Wellesley, Mass., featured a talk by Harvard professor and Brigham and Women’s Hospital nephrologist, Julian Seifter, MD, who with his wife, Betsy Seifter, PhD, coauthored After the Diagnosis: Transcending Chronic Illness. This award-winning book is based on Julian’s experiences both as a physician and as a patient living with diabetes. We asked Julian to tell us how he and Betsy developed their engaging narrative writing style.

In school we learned the elements of a good story: exposition or stage-setting; rising action, in which conflict is set up for the main character; climax or turning point; and falling action, which wraps things up and provides resolution or closure, whereby conflict is worked out. Medical stories, Julian reminded us, have suspense built into them. Medical history and work-up lead to a diagnosis, and the crux of each narrative is the moment when a creative solution emerges and the patient transcends chronic illness. In After the Diagnosis, the situations became the narrative.

Julian shared several narratives from his book to illustrate that patients’ stories of struggles with health issues are poignant—they get you involved. A patient is no longer just a medical diagnosis. You understand what the patient’s life is like, and where the patient is coming from. “It’s not all about illness,” he said. “People need to walk the dog, take care of themselves... and not have [their illness] take over their lives.” Because each patient has a unique perception, the same illness can yield two entirely different stories. And each story has a point, which makes it interesting.

To protect patients’ privacy, Julian and Betsy changed their names and characteristics, and in some cases created composites, to ensure that individual patients were unidentifiable. Betsy, who attended the dinner meeting with her husband, commented that, to this end, “fictionalizing is okay.”

When asked what makes a good collaboration between a clinician and a writer, the Seifters said that, in their case, the book began “at the kitchen table.” Betsy translated medical terminology into language appropriate for a general audience. Equally important, she persuaded her husband to talk about his own illness, thereby giving the reader a sense of his compassion and empathy. And Betsy’s writing skills (her PhD is in English literature) complemented Julian’s medical expertise. They stressed the importance of “batting ideas back and forth” as part of the collaborative process, noting that “two minds really are better [than one].” They acknowledged, however, that sharing a kitchen table is not a
June Report continued from page 2

requisite—collaborations could be handled by e-mail, phone, etc. The important thing, they said, is to put thoughts down on paper.

Julian said he thinks that storytelling in medicine is important on many levels and that medical stories—not just controlled, randomized trials—can provide “evidence.” People like to tell their stories, and listening is important because you learn how people cope with illness. He admits, however, that this can be hard to accomplish in the era of what he calls the “20-minute, Jiffy Lube visit.” One of the downfalls of teaching modern, simulated medicine is that the practice mannequin can simulate the medical condition but not the patient. Too often, the physician may push emotion aside and focus only on getting things done. But at what expense? Sometimes, he said, patients are not necessarily wishing for a cure, but for comfort. With that in mind, he may ask a patient, “Are you a spiritual person? Do you pray?”

For Julian Seifter, the human element is the biggest satisfaction in practicing medicine, and he believes it can only be experienced by talking with patients and listening. “Doctors need stories, patients need stories, readers need stories,” he said. We are all in this together.

—Marisa Greenfield, Secretary

Personal Notes

Several chapter members will be contributing to the AMWA Annual Conference program in Columbus, Ohio, in November:

• Thomas Gegeny, MS, ELS, team lead and senior medical writer at Envision Scientific Solutions, Southport, Conn., is leading the workshop on “Effectively Searching Online Databases” and co-leading the workshop on “Introduction to Basic Virology.”

• Andrea Gwosdow, PhD, president of Gwosdow Associates Science Consultants LLC, Arlington, Mass., is leading the workshop on “Business Ethics for Medical Communicators” and co-leading the workshop on “Ethical Standards in Medical Publication.”

• Shanna McClennen, PhD, freelance writer, Needham, Mass., is leading a luncheon roundtable on “Priority Management: Being a Professional and a Parent.”

• Marissa Seligman, PharmD, senior vice president at pmICME, Boston, is co-leading a seminar on the effects of the Sunshine Act on medical writers: “Where Does the Sun Shine? The Regulatory Environment, Education, and Promotions.” Marissa, who is editor of ACEHP Almanac, is also a panelist in an open session on “Getting Published: A Discussion with Editors of Medical Communication Publications.”

• Jill Shuman, MS, ELS, principal of the Writers Group in Woburn, Mass., and an instructor at Tufts University, is leading the workshop on “Essential Ethics for Medical Communicators.”

• Debra Stamper, PhD, senior manager, medical writing at Veristat, Holliston, Mass., is leading a roundtable on “Full, Abbreviated, or Synoptic: Which Type of CSR to Use and When.”

• Jane Stephenson, PhD, MBA, director of medical writing, Boehringer Ingelheim Pharmaceuticals, Ridgefield, Conn., is leading the workshop on “Writing an Investigator Brochure.”

Asha Jayakumar, PhD, a 2012 recipient of the New England Chapter's Linn Membership Award, has landed her first full-time writing position. She is now a scientific writer on the hemophilia team at Biogen Idec, where her responsibilities include posters, platform presentations, abstracts, supplementary documents for manuscripts, and Q&As. She was previously a postdoctoral fellow at Yale University School of Medicine.

Cynthia Barber, PhD, is now a medical writer at Vertex Pharmaceuticals, Cambridge, Mass. She was previously a postdoctoral fellow at Brandeis University.

Kevin Flynn, MA, has been named senior medical director at Informa Training Partners, Walpole, Mass. He was previously director, scientific communications at Analgesic Solutions. Kevin is a past president of the New England Chapter and an AMWA fellow, and he is a frequent contributor to AMWA programs locally and nationally.

Marisa Greenfield, MS, our chapter secretary this year, was a panelist in a seminar on “Life as a Science Editor/Writer,” part of a series on alternative careers in the sciences sponsored by the postdoc association at Children's Hospital Boston. Marisa is an independent medical writer in Middleton, Mass.

CHAPTER CHANGES: Kimberly Cufari has moved to Pittsford, N.Y., and Jennifer DiNieri, PhD, to Union City, N.J.; both are now members of the Empire State-Metro New York Chapter. Manjula Puthenadem, PhD, who served on our chapter’s Connecticut Programs Committee for 3 years and was a 2012 recipient of a Linn Membership Award, has moved to Pickerington, Ohio, where she is continuing to work as a freelance medical writer. She is now a member of the Ohio Valley Chapter.
Obituary

We recently learned that Morris W. Ferrari, DC, a past president of the New England Chapter, died on April 25 at the age of 62 after a long struggle with complications from type 1 diabetes.

A 1975 graduate of the National College of Chiropractic, Morris maintained a private practice in Rockland, Mass., for some 25 years. He joined AMWA in 1978, when he became editor of the New England Journal of Chiropractic, a volunteer position he held for a number of years. In 1982-83 he was appointed to our chapter’s Executive Council as a member-at-large and subsequently served two terms as treasurer. He was president in 1986-87 and remained on the Executive Council in various positions for another 10 years. A frequent attendee at AMWA annual conferences, he led a workshop on “Avoiding the Physical Discomforts of Medical Writing” at the 1981 conference in Toronto and again in 1984 in San Antonio.

—Judy Linn

New Members

The New England Chapter cordially welcomes those from our six-state region who have recently joined AMWA, reestablished their affiliation with the association, or moved here from another chapter area:

Gaelen Adam, MLIS
South Dartmouth, Massachusetts
Brown University Center for Evidence-Based Medicine

Victoria Alexander
New England Journal of Medicine
Boston, Mass.

Janel Amador, MA
ARIAD Pharmaceuticals
Cambridge, Massachusetts

Mary G. Barlow
Whitinsville, Massachusetts

Jean R. Barilla, MS
Marlborough, Massachusetts
[from Mid-Atlantic Chapter]

Amy Behrens, MS
CommunicateHealth Inc.
Northampton, Massachusetts

Kelly Burns
East Haddam, Connecticut

Xin Chen, MD, DDS, MSc
Biogen Idec
Cambridge, Massachusetts

Kathleen A. Dave, PhD
Medford, Massachusetts
Harvard University

Alana Simorellis Flores
Westford, Massachusetts

Michelle C. Fong, BA
Michelle Fong Consulting Inc.
Hope, Maine

Thomas P. Gajda
Thomas Paul Communications LLC
Ludlow, Massachusetts

John E. Garrison, PhD
Peabody, Massachusetts

Amy M. Gates, MPH, RN
Newton, Massachusetts

Lisa A. Herman, RPh, PharmD, MS
Sunovion Pharmaceuticals Inc.
Marlborough, Massachusetts

Ann Hill
Newton, Massachusetts

Mary C. Howk
Auburn, Massachusetts

Serena Domolky Howlett, JD, MPH
Stow, Massachusetts

Nicole D. Hunt, PhD
Chelsea, Massachusetts
ARIAD Pharmaceuticals

Stephen J. Jones, PhD
Danvers, Massachusetts

Maralyn E. Kaufman, PhD
Marshfield, Massachusetts

Stephanie C. Licitra, PhD
Biogen Idec
Weston, Massachusetts

Alice R. Lim, MS
Arlington, Massachusetts

LiQun Liu, PhD
Brookline, Massachusetts

Lynn M. Lundgren, RPh, JD
Warwick, Rhode Island

Rapeephan E. Maude, MD, MSc
Saint Vincent Hospital
Worcester, Massachusetts

Meaghan O’Keeffe, BSN, RN
Framingham, Massachusetts

Mariana Ovnic, PhD
MO’s Medical LLC
Winchester, Massachusetts

Margaret Perkins
New England Journal of Medicine
Boston, Massachusetts

Matthew W. Richardson, MD
Granby, Massachusetts

Komal Sane, PhD
Brighton, Massachusetts

Susan C. Sheridan, BA
Fairfield, Connecticut

Jerzy Stocki, MD
North Stonington, Connecticut

Jessica Tesell
Shrewsbury, Massachusetts

Katherine Thomson, RN, MA
Freedom, New Hampshire

Leslie Wald
Continuing Education Alliance
Stamford, Connecticut

Maria Wheldon, RN
Broad Brook, Connecticut
Alexion Pharmaceuticals Inc.

Linda Williams, RPh
New Canaan, Connecticut
Regeneron Pharmaceuticals Inc.
[from Empire State-Metro NY Chapter]

Debra Willins, PhD
Watertown, Massachusetts
AVEO Oncology
How to Register for September 11 Meeting

You can register for this event either online or by mail, depending on how you wish to pay. Either way, if you sign up before 5:00 p.m. on Thursday, September 5, you can take advantage of the lower fee for early registration.

To pay by credit card or e-check, use the electronic registration form on the chapter website (www.amwa-ne.org). Fill it out and continue to the PayPal form, where you can enter your credit card information. (You don’t need a PayPal account, and you will not be charged a fee for the transaction.)

To pay by check, download the printable registration form from the chapter website (www.amwa-ne.org), print a copy, fill it out, and mail it with your check to the address on the form. Please note that if you want to pay by check, you must make sure that we receive your registration by Thursday, September 5. After that, we can only accept payment via the electronic registration form.

Directions to September 11 Meeting

Mick Morgan’s Irish Pub & Restaurant
118 Needham St, Newton, Mass.
617-795-0136

The restaurant is located in the Newton Highlands area, about a mile from Route 128. There is free parking.

Heading North or South on Route 128/I-95:
Take Exit 19A for Highland Avenue toward Newton Highlands. Go about a half mile on Highland Avenue, then continue straight onto Needham Street for another half mile. The restaurant is on the right.

For detailed driving directions, you can go to: http://boston.citysearch.com/profile/603499912/newton_ma/mick_morgan_s.html

Need a ride to the meeting?
If you don’t have a car, ask Judy Linn (judyhlinn@aol.com) whether there is someone from your area who might be able to give you a lift.

AMWA New England E-News

Keep an eye out for an occasional email from chapter president Shanna McClennen with “AMWA New England E-News” in the subject line. The brief messages let you know about local job openings, freelance opportunities, upcoming chapter meetings, and other events of possible interest to New England AMWA members.

Linn Membership Awards

New England Chapter Will Pay for National Dues

The New England Chapter’s competitive Judy Linn Membership Awards for new medical writers cover the cost of one year’s membership in AMWA and free registration for all the regular chapter meetings during the award year. As a further benefit, experienced members, including those who serve on the Membership Awards Committee, are available to provide guidance in their various areas of expertise. The chapter will consider applications from candidates who are at an early stage in their career and are living and working in New England. If you know someone who may be qualified for this award, or if you wish to apply yourself, go to www.amwa-ne.org and click on Awards.

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Judy Linn, Jill Shuman

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