Australasian Medical Writers Association Inc.

Annual Report
2019-2020

www.medicalwriters.org
AMWA Mission Statement

The Australasian Medical Writers Association (AMWA) is the peak body for promoting excellence in health and medical communications in Australia and New Zealand through conferences, continuing education, networking and mentoring. AMWA members are writers, editors and communicators with a passion for health and medicine, and include:

- Specialist journalists working for the mainstream media, B2B publications and websites, freelancers and bloggers
- Technical writers and editors working with academic and specialist publications, electronic and online media
- Regulatory writers and communications professionals working for the pharmaceutical industry, government, research institutes and patient advocacy organisations
- Doctors, nurses and allied health professionals interested in expanding their careers into writing or editing

AMWA has a membership of 200–300 members from Australia, New Zealand and the Asia-Pacific region.

AMWA Executive Committee 2019-2020

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<td>Secretary</td>
<td>Shelley Reid</td>
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Life Members

Three more honorary life memberships were conferred to the following members

Dr Justin Coleman
Michelle Guillemand
Dr Sarah McKay

President’s Report

Emma Henshall

With my first year in the role of president complete, I’d like to thank the committee for their constant support and energy throughout an unpredictable year. I’d like to make special mention of our longstanding committee members for supporting the new Executive Committee through this transition. We embarked on our first year together with a strategic planning day and Association Boards & Governance training. This was a great opportunity for us to align on the strategic plans for AMWA going forward. Thank you to Jocelyne for organising the training and to Fiona for organising the venue.
In April, we made the difficult decision to cancel our 37th Annual Conference, *Communication in 2020: Changes and Challenges* due to COVID-19. We then re-focused our efforts on other tasks, including upgrading the website and updating the constitution.

I’m happy to report that our new website has streamlined our processes and significantly reduced the administrative burden. We have improved the user experience for our members, especially when booking events and processing payments. It also enables us to make timely web updates and to develop members’ resources with ease. We’re confident that the new system will lift AMWA’s online presence and be much simpler for future committee members to master.

I thank Shelley for taking the lead on updating our constitution. A key policy update was the removal of the affiliate membership option and the inclusion of student membership. AMWA aims to offer professional support to all medical writers, and believe that those who work for pharmaceutical companies should not be exempt from the benefits of full membership.

Georgina Taylor was the winner of the 2020 AMWA Early Career Award with her discussion of the importance of vigilance in early cancer detection. I thank Mark for his work on this initiative, including the need to get creative with the logistics under COVID-19 restrictions.

In the absence of our annual conference, we are hosting a special virtual event, *Medical Writing and Communication During the COVID-19 Crisis* to follow our virtual AGM in November, 2020. I thank Jocelyne for taking the lead on this initiative and bringing together an impressive expert panel. This event is free and open to all as a way to increase our visibility and drive membership uptake.

The AMWA mentorship program continues to be a success, with nine mentors currently offering their expertise to our members.

AMWA memberships have dropped slightly this year, which is likely attributed to the uncertainty faced by many of our members due to the pandemic, as well as the cancellation of our annual conference.

This year, AMWA ran three professional development webinars: Amanda Salis in November 2019, Rhonda Bracey in March and Hilary Cadman in May 2020 – all of which were well attended. We also held local networking events (where permitted under COVID-19 restrictions) in Sydney, Melbourne and Auckland – welcoming new and current members.

Finally, I’d like to thank each and every member of the AMWA Committee for their commitment to our association: Jocelyne Basseal, Shelley Reid, Meredith McGowan, Lynnette Hoffman, Fiona Mackinnon and Mark Caswell, as well as our volunteer, Eve Vickerson. And a very special thanks to Libby Evans, whose support goes far beyond the duties of a Digital Marketing Assistant.

**Treasurer's Report**

**Meredith McGowan**

I am pleased to report that AMWA is in a good financial position as of 30 June 2020 with total assets of $98,198. Following the trend from previous years, there was a decrease in
membership income this year, down to $19,971 from $16,300 (and down from $21,008 in 2018).

It became clear early on that we were not going to have a physical conference this year. The deposit for the conference centre had already been paid, and it remains for when the conference does go ahead, so no money was lost.

Without a conference, it was clear that we were going to save a considerable amount of money. The committee decided that this should flow on as a benefit to our members and consequently we have been delivering free webinars and a free online conference. Money was raised through sponsorship to cover the cost of the online conference. It was also decided that we could spend money on updating the website. Oncord was engaged to develop a new website with greater functionality.

The financial statement was prepared by Wimmera Mallee Accounting.

**Membership Secretary Report**

**Libby Evans and Shelley Reid**

From 1 July 2019, to 30 June 2020, AMWA received 128 annual membership renewals and 79 new members. These numbers are slightly down from last year with 158 annual membership renewals and 104 new members in 2018/2019 (Figure 1). The cancellation of the 37th annual conference, as well as other networking events due to the COVID-19 pandemic could explain the slight decrease in both annual membership renewals and new memberships in the 2019/2020 year. Memberships for the current financial year (2020/2021) are ongoing with a combined total of 80 annual membership renewals and new memberships.

Just over half (59%) of new AMWA members are freelance health and medical communicators (Figure 2). This figure is slightly up on the 2017–2019 data of 52 per cent. The majority of new AMWA members work in either academic writing (34%) or medical and health journalism (33%) (Figure 3). This trend is comparable to the 2017–2019 data of 36 per cent and 31 per cent respectively.

The majority of AMWA members are based in Australia, accounting for 92 per cent (73/79) of new AMWA memberships and 92 per cent (118/128) of annual membership renewals during the 2019/2020 year (Figure 4). A small proportion of AMWA members are based in New Zealand, accounting for 5 per cent (4/79) of new AMWA memberships and 6 per cent (8/128) of annual membership renewals (Figure 4). The remaining two new AMWA memberships are from the US and Singapore and two membership renewals are from France and the UK (these are not included in Figure 4).

The long-awaited transition to a new, integrated and user-friendly website has strengthened processes for membership. All member applications are submitted via the website for faster processing. Renewal notices are generated in advance of the date of joining so that each membership payment is for a full 12 months. Should renewals not be made on time, membership will automatically expire. Another advantage of the new website is the capacity for financial members to update their contact details should these change. It is the
responsibility of members to supply AMWA with current details. Please note online payments are by credit card only.

**Figure 1: AMWA membership trend 2012 – 2020**

**Figure 2: Percentage of new AMWA members who are freelancers July 2017 – June 2020**

**Figure 3: Types of writing – new AMWA members July 2017 – June 2020**
Australasian Health and Medical Journal Editors’ Network (AHMEN)

Fiona MacKinnon
AHMEN provides a community where members can keep up to date with the latest trends and innovations, and to discuss matters of common interest. The group usually does this through face-to-face events in different cities, but also offers online activities such as webinars. Fiona Mackinnon is the Chair of this group and organises events with the help of Jocelyne Basseal (now Vice President of AMWA). Both are members of the AMWA committee.

Activities
AHMEN held a 3-hour workshop at AMWA’s annual conference in Sydney on Friday 23 August 2019. Delegates paid $120 to attend and presenters were free; 25-30 people participated including Editors from MJA, Australian Prescriber, specialised medical and nursing journals and the publishers Wiley and CSIRO. The program for the workshop was:

- **Publication ethics** (Ginny Barbour – Open Access Strategy Group, Office of Research Ethics & Integrity QUT – see cases below)
- **Panel discussion – The future of Open Access and implications for journal editors** (Chair: Ginny Barbour, panellists: Andrea Marshall – Editor of Australian Critical Care, Martin Borchert – Executive librarian UNSW, Andrew Stammer – CSIRO publishing and Convener of the Scholarly Publishing Committee)
- **Using journal citation data wisely** (Anthony Dona, Clarivate Analytics)

Cases discussed at the publication ethics workshop included:

**Missing data.** During the process of peer review an author disclosed that their raw data is missing (due to hardware fault at their institution). This was mentioned by the authors on their reply to the reviewers when one of the reviewers asked them to report 1 more measurement. The reviewers and editors thought the study was novel. The editor considered the following options before contacting the authors to discuss by phone:
• Continue to publish. The additional measurement will not change the overall message of the article and the primary result will not change. However, there is no question that the raw data is not available.

• Could the authors replace the missing data? Although it was a retrospective study, there might have been patients that went through the same clinical protocol.

**Questions for discussion:**

• Should the journal publish the paper?
• If it does, is there an appropriate way to indicate the status of the underlying data?
• Should the authors have behaved differently?
• What processes could the journal put in place to prevent this situation in future?

**Conflicting viewpoints between a Guest Editor and authors.** The journal commissioned an editorial from a group of authors on a controversial topic for a themed edition, which was being overseen by two Guest Editors. The editorial received two peer reviews and, following input from the Guest Editors and Editor-in-Chief, the authors were asked to respond to the reviewers’ comments and revise their paper. The authors did this; however, when the Guest Editors considered the revised paper, they were concerned that some of the authors’ concluding sentences would provide support for a program, of which the Guest Editors were strongly opposed. The journal went back to the authors with the Guest Editors’ concerns and asked if they would consider some suggested changes from the Guest Editors, largely to tone down their conclusion. The Editorial was based on research conducted by the authors, and they felt strongly about how they presented their findings. They did not want to change their wording.

**Questions for discussion:**

• What role should Guest Editors have in requesting changes to an Editorial, if the reason they want to change the paper is because they don’t agree with its arguments?
• Following the peer review process, how much responsibility should Editors take on in improving a paper with respect to things like fact checking and making sure it does accurately represent the available evidence?
• Should the paper be considered almost untouchable after the peer review process, or should editors still be able to significantly change a paper following peer review?

**How to handle online corrections.** A journal is online only and has a corrections and retractions policy that states that, if a correction is made, a new version of the corrected article will be posted to the website and the previous versions will be archived, and a correction will be published. The journal staff is only a small team and the Editor is in charge of publishing articles on the website.

**Questions for discussion:**

• If an error is spotted once the article is published, can the Editor fix it without the need to publish a correction?
• Is there a timeframe in which they should be able to fix it (e.g. within 5 minutes of publishing/before sending out notifications that the article is published/before indexing)?
• Are there certain kinds of errors where this might be ok (e.g. spelling mistakes, incorrect author affiliation)?
• When would this process definitely not be acceptable?

Future activities
Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, an online seminar is planned for November 2020 on the topic of medical communication on the COVID-19 pandemic.

Online Report (Website, e-Newsletter & Social Media)

Libby Evans

E-newsletter: The AMWA e-newsletter was distributed to our AMWA membership on a bimonthly basis throughout the 2019/2020 calendar year, with issues in October, December, February, April, and June. The e-newsletter featured regular industry news items including job advertisements, virtual events such as the AMWA Virtual Happy Hour, professional development opportunities such as the AMWA Early Career Award as well as information on upcoming AMWA PDP webinars.

Mailchimp was the platform used to distribute our bimonthly e-newsletters. The average open rate of the AMWA e-newsletter was just over 50 per cent. This was above the industry average of approximately 30 per cent. AMWA had a total of 858 subscribers for the 2019/2020 year. This is an increase of 59 subscribers since 1 July 2019.

Social Media: AMWA has three social media accounts which include LinkedIn, Facebook (page and AMWA members group) and Twitter.

AMWA's LinkedIn account had 398 followers, an increase of 296 since 1 July 2019. Average engagement for the year was 5.72 per cent, this was an increase on last year of 0.94 per cent. Posting frequency on LinkedIn was once per week.

The AMWA Facebook page had 619 followers, an increase of 128 since 1 July 2019. The average frequency of Facebook page posts was twice weekly. The AMWA Facebook group had 145 members, this is an increase of 42 members since 1 July 2019.

Twitter had 1278 followers, an increase of 130 since 1 July 2019. Frequency of tweets were twice weekly.

Website: AMWA has a website that is regularly updated with the latest industry news and events. The current website has a dedicated ‘training’ tab which offers both members and non-members of AMWA resources and training information relevant to the medical communications industry, as well as a list of AMWA mentors for AMWA members to receive mentoring from. The AMWA website also has a members-only portal, where members can list on the Freelancer Directory and access additional member-only information.

The AMWA website is currently undergoing an upgrade which we are looking forward to revealing to AMWA members in the coming months.
AMWA Early Career Award

Mark Caswell
The Committee launched the AMWA Early-Career Award following the 2017 conference and 2020 was its third year of running. The primary purpose of the award is to assist aspiring medical writers’ transition from tertiary education or other areas of employment into full-time medical writing. Individuals with less than two years’ experience in medical writing are eligible to apply. A secondary purpose of the award is to raise awareness and encourage people entering medical writing to join AMWA; all applicants must be financial members of AMWA. The winner of the award usually receives free conference registration and workshop attendance, plus $1000 towards travel and accommodation.

This year the Award attracted seven eligible candidates. All of this year’s applicants were financial members of AMWA which was positive as it has been a problem in previous years with several submissions being from people who were not current members.

The Committee was able to secure the judging services of Sarah McKay for the 2020 Award. In a unanimous decision, it was decided that Georgina Taylor’s piece was the winner. In the words of Sarah:

“Her calm and authoritative tone came through clearly and was enhanced by her deft weaving of personal experience in GP practice while at the same time respecting her audience’s obvious expertise and concerns. Taylor’s biography is also exceptional, with a hint of humour to warm up her writing (this is rare to see!).”

As the Annual Conference for 2020 was cancelled, Georgina received $1,000 cash.

In general, the Committee considers 2020 was a successful year for the Award. The Committee welcomes suggestions to increase the number and quality of submissions in 2021.

Professional Development Program & Workshops

Libby Evans
The AMWA professional development program allows members to hone existing skills and provides the opportunity to develop new ones. Professional development is an important AMWA function. Over the past year, AMWA held the following workshops:

- 8 November 2019: Time-saving strategies for reading, writing, editing and reviewing original research papers with Amanda Salis
- 20 March 2020: Save time and your sanity: customising Microsoft Word for efficiency with Rhonda Bracey
- 7 May 2020: Tools for writing and editing with Dr Hilary Cadman
- 9 July 2020: Communicating risk effectively with Dr Hilary Cadman

Due to the cancellation of the conference, it was not possible to provide face-to-face workshops this year. It is hoped, however, that the free online event Medical Writing & Communication During the COVID-19 Crisis will provide members with an excellent opportunity for professional development.
2019 Conference Report

Emma Henshall

In August 2019, we held our 36th Annual Conference, *New Perspectives and Future Directions* in Manly, NSW.

The conference was a great success and we received overwhelmingly positive feedback both during the event and in the follow-up survey. Over 85 per cent of respondents stated that they were very satisfied or satisfied with the topics, speakers, workshops and venue. The supportive and collegiate culture of AMWA was evident throughout the two-day event and was captured in the follow-up survey. Over 90 per cent of respondents identified networking as the most enjoyable aspect of the conference outside of the program.

Approximately 30 per cent of attendees were not AMWA members, which may indicate the broader reach of the conference and the opportunity it presents for attracting new members.

Following the success of this layout in previous years, Friday and Saturday were split into plenary sessions in the morning and workshops in the afternoon. Valerie Khoo, CEO of the Australian Writers’ Centre opened the conference with a keynote address. During session one, digital health trends to know, we heard presentations on medical artificial intelligence, digital health apps and Wikipedia in the medical ecosystem. Session two focused on marketing, compliance and regulations, including presentations on the Medicines Australia Code of Conduct, Good Publication Practice 3 (GPP3) and the ethical dilemma of tainted data. Afternoon workshops included public speaking, medical blogging, freelance writing success strategies, as well as the AHMEN meeting. Attendees concluded the day with a relaxed dinner at the local sailing club.

On Saturday, our third plenary session covered the importance of the patient voice, followed by a career panel discussion, where a robust audience discussion ensued regarding the dilemma some feel about working for the pharmaceutical industry. The conference concluded after afternoon workshops on grant writing, digital marketing, mindfulness in medical writing and the evolving role of medical writers in pharma.