

# Writers as Guideline Champions? Webinar on the Joint Position Statement

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In January 2017, the American Medical Writers Association (AMWA), the European Medical Writers Association (EMWA), and the International Society for Medical Publication Professionals (ISMPP) released a Joint Position Statement (JPS) on the Role of Professional Medical Writers,<sup>1-3</sup> the first unified position on the role of professional medical writers from the 3 leading professional organizations.

On May 30, 2018, these 3 organizations joined with the EQUATOR Network<sup>4</sup> to provide a joint educational webinar on the importance of reporting guidelines and the role of professional medical writers as guideline champions. The webinar, titled “Joint Position Statement on the Role of Professional Medical Writers: Positioning and Advocating for Writers as Guideline Champions,” was hosted through the ISMPP University (or ISMPP U) platform and attracted more than 140 attendees from around the world. This webinar underscored the mission of the AMWA-EMWA-ISMPP JPS and its expanding influence and reinforced the shared goal of the JPS and the EQUATOR Network to promote good reporting practices.

The webinar featured 2 speakers: Professor Karen L. Woolley, BHMS Ed Hons, PhD, CMPP (Envision Pharma Group), who represented the JPS as a coauthor; and Caroline Struthers, MSc (UK EQUATOR Centre), who represented the EQUATOR Network.

Professor Woolley first described the development of the JPS. For the first time, the 3 leading professional organizations collaborated to “fill an unmet need to speak with one voice for the global writing profession,” Woolley noted. The writing team consisted of 4 senior-level representatives from these organizations (Art Gertel, AMWA; Chris Winchester, EMWA; and Karen Woolley and Yvonne Yarker, ISMPP). The end product of this collaboration was a unified, concise, and evidence-based statement that provides clear and practical

guidance to medical writing and publication professionals around the globe.

The JPS has increased its reach since its initial release in 2017. It has been translated into 10 languages and has gained broad endorsement and recognition from multiple stakeholders, such as the EQUATOR Network, the European Association of Science Editors, the Council of Science Editors, the Board of Editors in the Life Sciences, the Association of Regulatory and Clinical Scientists, and the Australasian Medical Writers Association.

According to the JPS, professional medical writers are responsible for consulting appropriate guidelines and ensuring that authors and sponsors are aware of their obligations under these guidelines. These responsibilities call for professional medical writers to be guideline champions. Medical writers should have the time and expertise to help authors identify and adhere to relevant reporting guidelines. Reassuringly, when attendees of the webinar were asked if professional medical writers should be guideline champions, 95% (119/125) responded “YES.”

A free and practical online tool to help medical writers and publication professionals achieve good reporting is the reporting guideline library from the EQUATOR Network. Caroline Struthers introduced the history of the Network and its ongoing development. Founded by the world-renowned statistician Doug Altman, Professor of Statistics in Medicine at the University of Oxford, the EQUATOR Network was launched in 2008 (Figure 1). The mission of the EQUATOR Network is to achieve accurate, complete, and transparent reporting of all health research studies to support research reproducibility and usefulness. Essentially, the Network aims to provide researchers around the world with “a one-stop-shop for writing and publishing high-impact health research,” as Struthers noted. The EQUATOR Network’s free, searchable online library contains more than

400 reporting guidelines, covering a wide range of study types and clinical areas. Additional resources are also available, such as the JPS and Good Publication Practice 3 guidelines, as well as examples of good reporting, guideline extensions, add-ons, and translations, and various toolkits for writing research reports.

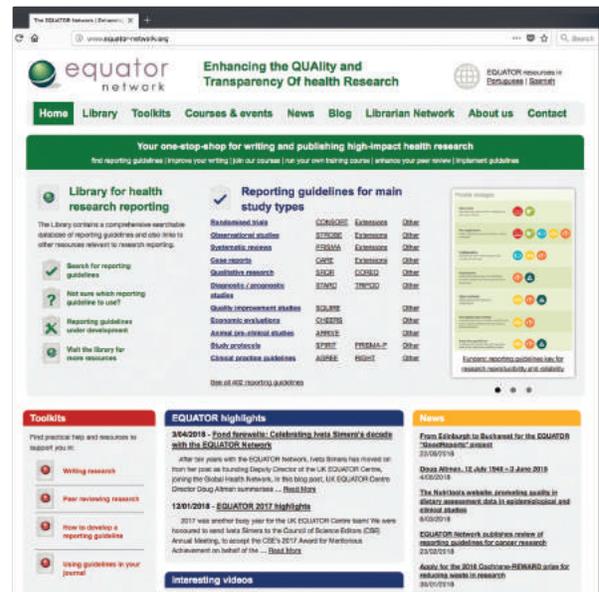
In the last decade, the EQUATOR Network has gained increasing recognition from the health research community and has been especially embraced by professional medical writers and publication professionals. Published evidence indicates that professional medical writing support is associated with better adherence to reporting guidelines and a lower risk of retractions for misconduct.<sup>5-9</sup>

How can medical writers and publication professionals better support the EQUATOR Network? Woolley stressed that writers can serve as reporting guideline champions by raising awareness of the relevant reporting guidelines and the EQUATOR Network to authors and sponsors. Medical writers and publication professionals may also be able to advance their careers by being advocates for the EQUATOR Network and for the JPS. Woolley suggested several career-enhancing activities, such as monitoring the EQUATOR Network and alerting their teams to new and relevant reporting guidelines, auditing and updating their teams' training regarding the use of reporting guidelines, and promoting the JPS proactively to authors and sponsors, especially by citing published evidence supporting the benefits of writing support. Through these activities, writers can provide practical and tangible support to their teams and contribute to best-practice reporting, which should be valued by managers, editors, peer reviewers, and readers. Medical writers and publication professionals should also advocate for and contribute to the evidence base on the integrity and value of professional medical writing support. By conducting and publishing research in this area, writers can gain respect as published authors and may even be invited to help develop new reporting guidelines.

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**Figure 1.** EQUATOR Network homepage.

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**A note from Professor Woolley:** Professor Doug Altman (shown above with me holding a copy of the JPS at the Peer Review Congress; Chicago, September 2017) recognized the merit of the JPS and commended the speakers on this webinar. Professor Altman passed away only a few days after this webinar. We can honor his memory by helping authors to adhere to reporting guidelines.