Preface

**2019 Postconference Issue: Online-Only Supplement**

Jim Cozzarin, ELS, MWC / AMWA Journal Editor

Welcome to the 2019 postconference issue!

Each year ~900 members, nonmembers, presenters, volunteers, awardees, exhibitors, and staff take time from their busy lives to come together for the AMWA Medical Writing & Communication Conference. This 4-day meeting is the flagship event of the year for AMWA members and provides an opportunity to attend open sessions and for-credit workshops, listen to presentations from our esteemed award winners, meet and greet exhibitors, view posters, and network with hundreds of colleagues. Yet, most of our members are unable to attend and therefore miss out on this amazing wealth of information and opportunity.

This exclusive online-only supplement continues our postconference coverage, including a Letter from past AMWA president Phyllis Minick, a report by Debra Erickson about San Diego Zoo Kids (a special presenter at the conference), and information from several of our exhibitors.

I hope you find this insight into the annual Medical Writing & Communication Conference to be of value. As you can see, if you missed it, you missed a lot! I hope to see you at the next conference in Baltimore, Maryland, where we will celebrate 80 years of AMWA!

Yours in AMWA,

—Jim
A Day in the Life of the 2019 AMWA Medical Writing & Communication Conference

Phyllis Minick / Past AMWA President, 1994–1995

Have you ever felt transported to a former life? That is what the AMWA staff did for me by arranging my visit to the 2019 Medical Writing & Communication Conference. As a long-ago AMWA President, I was eager to attend the annual conference (AC) in my hometown of San Diego, California, but obligations at home limited my registration to Friday afternoon’s programs. Even so, the experience was so great that I wanted to share some details.

My first contacts—Susan Krug, AMWA Executive Director; Katie Bergmann, AMWA Marketing & Communications Coordinator; and Melissa Kauffman, AMWA Program Coordinator—provided absolutely perfect interactions. Susan urged me to attend, Katie made the preliminary arrangements, and Melissa followed up—even walking me to the door of the first Education Session I attended. All kindnesses and courtesies were at utmost levels of helpfulness.

During my day at the AC, I had a most pleasurable afternoon and evening of sharing successes (and some failures) with other professionals and a swath of AMWA up-and-comers. Of the 3 sessions I chose, the first was “How to Check Consistency and Enforce Your House Style: Using PerfectIt in Submissions and Publication.” Speaker Dan Euman, CEO and Founder, was a delight: articulate, informative, and funny. He explained and demonstrated his system superbly. I found this “spell check” of style eminently worth owning. At the end of his audience-participation period, I asked Mr. Euman if some embarrassing error had caused him to invent this program. In doing so, I couldn’t help sharing my own such error—not correcting a misspelled name of a country where the author lived (I thought he should be able to spell the name of his own country)—for which I got fired. The large audience and I thoroughly enjoyed this Education Session packed into just 1 hour.

In my second session, “Med Write Talks II,” Research Scientist R. Michelle Sauer, PhD, provided fine background information in a TED Talk–type format. With a detail-filled presentation of her own experiences, Dr. Sauer evoked good interaction among the full house of participants. While there, I bumped into a former fellow AMWA chapter member in time to reminisce—the kind of opportunity for business and personal exchanges that underlies the successes so many of us gain from our AMWA experience.

The third and last of my Education Sessions was “By the Hour or By the Project.” The leader, Eleanor Mayfield, ELS, of ELM Communications, spoke briefly of her own freelance practice, then joined the audience at the midfloor microphone. There, she guided an exceptional interactive dialog with many participants of the very-well-attended session. Long-time freelancers freely offered advice and answered questions. Even after the session’s time was up, the discussion continued, as many attendees remained in the room, then gathered in small groups outside.

There, some just starting in their new profession of medical writer/editor described woes from attempting to combine their existing skills with the new ones required in their new positions. They now needed to write contracts with clients and balance the timing of long- and short-range jobs, billing, interviewing, record-keeping, and, especially, earning enough money for self-support. To a young woman who’d begun a therapy gym but sought a medical writing career, I recalled my own start-up.

As a sport scuba diver, I wrote medical advice for several magazines read by divers and travelers, then supplemented my articles with photos from an underwater photographer who needed text to publish! Combining skills for a specialized audience can build your portfolio and provide unique opportunities. Checking https://writersdigestshop.com/ for teaching and publishing opportunities helps.

In this Education Session, I and others gave the following advice: Find time to write several fill-in-the-blanks contracts adaptable to varied work situations so you’re prepared without stopping to invent that paperwork at the last minute. Have a legal “hold-harmless clause” ready to include in product contracts. Devise a sliding scale of charges by the hour, week, or job. Develop a file of clients with notes on individual requirements. Schedule your time IN WRITING with slots for new solicitations and old client follow-up. I couldn’t help saying to those gathered around us: “All of you are smart, educated, skilled, and energetic. HAVE FAITH IN YOURSELF!”

My AC day ended with dinner shared by AMWA friends and former Presidents. Later, inside my handsome AMWA tote bag, I found an unexpected gift—the 1995 Annual Conference Program with my own presidential message and photograph on the first page! AMWA Executive Director, Susan Krug, located and sent me this remarkable token of transport to my former AMWA life. Thank you, beyond my best words of appreciation.

~Phyllis
San Diego Zoo Kids: Bringing Healing, Happiness, and Hope to Ill Children and Their Families

Debra Erickson / Marketing Director – Communications and Interpretation, San Diego Zoo Global, San Diego, CA

It all started with a brief email from a nurse on a cancer ward in Northern California. She wrote a thank you note to the San Diego Zoo, explaining how the zoo’s “Panda Cam” provided distraction, comfort, and joy to her patients experiencing prolonged treatment. She summarized the effects of the live, 24-hour-a-day camera in this way: “My patients that watch Panda Cam have less pain, take less pain medication, and those are my patients that sleep through the night.” When her email was posted on social media, it received comments from more than 150 individuals who had also experienced the healing properties of the Panda Cam. In fact, unbeknown to us, health care workers around the world had already coined the phrase “Panda Therapy.”

Many of our wildlife care specialists and educators had also experienced for themselves the power of animals in helping ill children through their visits to Rady Children’s Hospital-San Diego for more than 60 years. Thus, we realized through our discussions with caregivers that sick kids could benefit from the healing properties of animals every day. There is a deep-rooted connection between humans and animals; those who have pets understand the pure joy that animals bring us. We are in awe of animals—and there’s growing evidence that having a connection with animals actually helps individuals heal and be healthier. Several studies over the years have also shown that pet-assisted therapy has a positive impact on pain levels of pediatric patients.

With this background, the idea behind San Diego Zoo Kids was to provide a closed-circuit, kid-friendly, noncommercial television channel for children’s hospitals, which could bring animals to children and their families who are unable to spend time with their pet or visit a zoo or aquarium in person.

After talking with hospital staff, our team learned that many facilities do not have the resources, staff time, or expertise to create and provide animal programming for their patients. They were thrilled to learn of San Diego Zoo Global’s interest in expanding its digital programming and expressed interest in this service.

San Diego Zoo Kids would give children the opportunity to see animals 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The channel would include videos of animals at the San Diego Zoo and San Diego Zoo Safari Park, conservation fieldwork, live animal cameras, keeper and scientist interviews, and content from partner zoos and aquariums. These videos would provide entertaining and enjoyable stories for children and their parents—and provide these families with hope.

Because we couldn’t bring the actual zoo into the hospital, San Diego Zoo Kids would do the next best thing: create a connection—a way for patients to virtually leave their beds and experience the world of animals and zoos. When kids are able to do that, they relax, they sleep better, they’re distracted from their troubles, and they can heal. And that’s what everyone wants—for kids to heal, be happy, and return home.

It took us more than a year to research and figure out the technology needed to bring children’s hospitals the program. The toughest part was finding a donor who had the vision to see the potential of the program. We shared the concept with T. Denny Sanford, a noted philanthropist who had funded Sanford Children’s Hospital as well as research on stem cells, type 1 diabetes, and breast cancer, and he saw the potential. He funded a pilot program and chose the facilities to receive the channel, including Rady Children’s Hospital, Sanford Children’s Hospital, the Children’s Hospital Los Angeles, and the Children’s Hospital of Colorado.

The channel debuted with just over 3 hours of content, but even then, it was an immediate hit with the children and hospital staff. In fact, Chuck Day, the Executive Director of the Ronald McDonald House in San Diego, heard such great things about the channel that he asked us to install it at his facility.

Mr Sanford was so impressed by the results of the pilot program that he funded the broadcast portion of the program for 5 years and gave the San Diego Zoo Global team a challenge: work with local communities, zoos, and aquariums, along with our donors, to raise the funds to cover the cost of the equipment.
And he gave us an audacious goal: bring the channel to 300 children's hospitals and Ronald McDonald Houses within 5 years.

After the pilot program, it took 9 months to recruit the next children's hospital, Primary Children's Hospital in Salt Lake City. We quickly learned that you can't cold call a children's hospital; you need to work within the local community or within the children's hospital network for an introduction to someone on the hospital staff who had the interest in providing the service to hospital patients. Primary Children's and their partner Ronald McDonald House have played a pivotal role in the success of the program. They have given freely of their time, participating in all 3 of the channel’s evaluations.

The second evaluation pursued questions focused on children, parents, and caregivers describing the “human experience” specific to phenomena provided by San Diego Zoo Kids. The study involved 3 children's hospitals and 1 Ronald McDonald House. One hundred hospitalized children, more than 100 parents of hospitalized children, and almost 90 hospital and Ronald McDonald House caregivers participated in the study. Our analysis of the data resulted in 7 key findings:

1. San Diego Zoo Kids makes children feel happy.
2. San Diego Zoo Kids effectively provides a zoo visit for children who cannot visit a zoo.
3. San Diego Zoo Kids helps children learn about animals and reinforces a conservation ethic.
4. San Diego Zoo Kids successfully distracts children from their reason for being in the hospital.
5. San Diego Zoo Kids prompts animal-related discourse between parent and child in the hospital setting.
6. San Diego Zoo Kids provides a shared experience that clinicians integrate into a child’s care.
7. San Diego Zoo Kids helps parents cope and persevere in stressful times.

The following is just one of the exchanges of a patient and parent with the evaluator:

**Child:** I get to watch it with my mom. She cried a lot, but when we watch it together, I get to see her smile.

**Parent:** Our leukemia is back for the 3rd time in the last year and a half. Each time it is more and more aggressive and through it all my son stays positive and the zoo channel helps us. He is more mature than I am about it all, and he always says when we watch the zoo channel is the only time I am not crying and that’s when I am the happiest. It’s because he loves animals. . . . The zoo channel helps us stay positive, and we watch it at the Ronald McDonald House and at the hospital and it makes a big difference in our lives. Our favorite segment is about the elephants and cancer research, because it gives us hope! This has been one of the brightest stars in our world these days. We are blessed to have it and pray the best for those who made it possible.

We have received unsolicited testimonies from hundreds of caregivers and parents on the healing properties of the channel. One mother, Jennifer, shared the story of her daughter Zoe's experience with the channel:

Zoe has stage four neuroblastoma, which unfortunately requires quite a bit of treatment. Her journey began with chemotherapy at Nemours Children's Hospital, and two back-to-back bone marrow transplants that required her to be in the hospital for a month each time. While in the hospital, Zoe discovered San Diego Zoo Kids. She is an animal lover and was so intrigued by the snippets of what she saw on the channel. San Diego Zoo Kids was an extremely important part of Zoe's journey, because she spent so much time hospitalized—she couldn't go anywhere for weeks and months at a time. To see her light up and find some happiness when she was watching the channel was so comforting. And if you ask Zoe what the favorite part of her journey was, she would say "San Diego Zoo Kids!" This channel meant so much to Zoe. It was something that brightened her day and made her feel that she was at the zoo when she couldn't visit.

**Zoe told her mom,**  “We have to go to San Diego Zoo. We absolutely have got to go there.” Her mom vowed that when they got through this journey, they would do everything they could possibly do to get there. Happily, Zoe went into remission. When she was feeling better, her dream came true—the whole family visited the San Diego Zoo to celebrate.

Thanks to the support of so many facilities, and a grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services that covers the cost of the equipment and installation, we achieved that aggressive goal that Mr Sanford set: San Diego Zoo Kids is now seen at 306 facilities in 44 states and 12 countries because it brings healing and happiness, and most importantly, hope, to ill patients and their families.

If you would like to bring the healing properties of San Diego Zoo Kids to your children's hospital or Ronald McDonald House, at no cost, please contact San Diego Zoo Global Marketing Director Debra Erickson at derickson@sandiegozoo.org.

The AMA Manual of Style is a well-respected, comprehensive reference for medical writers, editors, and publishers. First appearing in 1962 as an internal document for the staff of JAMA and the Archives medical specialty journals, the stylebook has grown over the past 5 decades to become a source widely used by publishers, academics, companies, freelance writers and editors, and other organizations.

Written by the editorial staff at the JAMA Network and published by Oxford University Press, the 11th edition has been thoroughly revised, updated, and expanded. For an author, editor, or publisher working in scholarly publishing, the 23 chapters in this volume answer questions that arise in daily work as well as those that occur infrequently. There is guidance on citing sources; data displays (graphical and tabular); grammar, punctuation, plurals, and capitalization; correct and preferred usage; abbreviations; nomenclature (from genetics to oncology); copyright, licensing, and permissions; authorship; common ethical concerns; editorial policies; units of measure; numbers, study design and types, and statistics; equations; and electronic editing and proofreading. The book concludes with a list of other resources that may be helpful to authors and editors.

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Find the members-only promo codes at www.amwa.org/partner_discounts. Member login required.
Save the date! The 2020 Medical Writing & Communication Conference will be held October 11-14, 2020, in Baltimore, Maryland. Not only will we be at a fabulous location in Baltimore’s beautiful Inner Harbor, we will also be celebrating AMWA’s 80th anniversary … and we have a lot to celebrate!

AMWA’s Medical Writing & Communication Conference focuses on trends and opportunities in medical communications. It is the go-to event for our profession, the place where we find our people, our space for networking, and our place for professional development. The 2020 Annual Conference Program Committee has been working diligently to develop a conference program that will appeal to the diverse needs of our members and other medical communicators. For example, education sessions and AMWA workshops will address professional focus areas such as regulatory writing, scientific publications, health communication, promotional writing, and grantsmanship; core knowledge; career development; and more. Highlighted in the program are trend-setting topics, such as artificial intelligence, data visualization, structured authoring, and patient engagement. With institutions such as Johns Hopkins University, the National Institutes of Health, and the US Food and Drug Administration in the area, we are also taking advantage of local expertise.

The 2020 conference will be a blend of new and established traditions. At the core of the conference are more than 35 AMWA workshops, many of which are new and designed to meet the evolving needs of medical communicators. Back by popular demand are a speed networking session and the popular Med Write Talks. New for this year are a panel discussion on the state of the industry; a bioethics session with Ruth Faden, founder and former director of the Johns Hopkins Berman Institute of Bioethics; an 80th anniversary reception; and other exciting features.

You may have noticed that, instead of our usual Wednesday through Saturday schedule, this year’s conference will be held on Sunday through Wednesday. Sunday is a preconference day, with workshops and special sessions. Monday through Wednesday are packed with education sessions, AMWA workshops, roundtable discussions, posters, panel discussions, and networking opportunities. I hope this schedule allows you to take time to sightsee either the weekend before or after the conference. The area is home to the National Aquarium, the Maryland Science Center, and historic ships in the Inner Harbor. You can take a harbor cruise or water taxi to see the city from the water. If you’re a history buff, Fort McHenry, site of the Battle of Baltimore that inspired Francis Scott Key to pen “The Star-Spangled Banner,” is at Baltimore’s Locust Point. I, personally, am looking forward to being in Charm City again. It’s been over 20 years since I visited Baltimore’s Inner Harbor, and I’m excited to see it again.

The field of medical communication is changing rapidly, creating both challenges and opportunities. As we celebrate AMWA’s 80th anniversary, we also look to the future. Learn what’s new at the 2020 Medical Writing & Communication Conference, and share the vision.

Stay tuned for registration information, and I hope to see you in Baltimore!