



## 2012 CONFERENCE COVERAGE

### McGOVERN AWARD LECTURE: PUTTING OUR WORDS INTO ACTION

**Neal Baer, MD**

*Pediatrician; Medical Expert and Senior Fellow at the University of Southern California Annenberg Center on Communication Leadership & Policy; Television Writer; Former Executive Producer of CBS-TV's A Gifted Mind and NBC's ER and Law & Order: SVU; People's Choice Award Winner; and Seven-Time Emmy Award Nominee*

**By Julie L. Phelan, MD, MBA**

Medical writers are uniquely positioned not only to inform the public of health advancements, but also to engage their audience through stories to help people gain a greater perspective, says Dr Neal Baer, who received AMWA's John P. McGovern Award and presented the keynote address at the 2012 annual conference.

As a television writer, Dr Baer tells stories to offer templates for viewers to ponder from the vantage point of their own experiences. He says he writes television scripts on controversial medical and public health issues, such as AIDS and childhood immunizations, because these medical and public health topics are in the "day-to-day struggles of our lives."

Medical professionals also tell stories. During his medical training, Dr Baer found the key to caring about patients was "to learn their stories" as each patient's narrative is unique. A good story, however, does not necessarily present all of the details of a patient's illness. For example, as a third-year medical student, he treated a 65-year-old patient who awoke during the night with chest pain. As the patient told the story, Dr Baer learned that the patient had experienced increasing shortness of breath during runs that led to a myocardial infarction (MI). However, upon examina-

tion, the patient had no congestive heart failure signs. So, he checked the patient's medical records, and the patient had a normal electrocardiogram. Puzzled, he decided to order the medical tests that helped him diagnose the patient with aplastic anemia, the medical condition that ultimately led to the MI. This patient taught him to look for the "twists and turns in the stories."

According to Dr Baer, "Being a good storyteller means connecting with one's patient." Incomplete stories can lead to poor outcomes. Moreover, he has found that the best doctors are great storytellers.

Will anyone pay attention to the stories we tell? "The answer is yes," he said. He further elaborated, "We make sense of our lives by telling stories." According to Dr Baer, we conduct private storytelling when we discuss our work with colleagues.

The stories that he has told on television are what Dr Baer calls public storytelling. These stories are personal, dramatic, and, he hopes, compelling. Medical writers present facts and figures. Then, another person may read the data and present a counterinterview—a personal, possibly non-medical viewpoint. To demonstrate this point, he responded to the anti-vaccination movement through a *Law & Order: SVU* episode, "Selfish." The episode explored the question of what a person's responsibility is to the com-

munity through a story line in which a young child dies after contracting measles from an unvaccinated child.

According to Dr Baer, "Stories are the currencies of our lives." He says a story should be told, even if it is controversial. Viewers become engaged as they watch the television characters "duke it out." If the show is particularly moving, the viewers may begin



*Neal Baer, MD (left), accepts the McGovern Award from from Melanie Fridl Ross, MSJ, ELS, a past president of AMWA.*

*Photo by D. Durgin Photography.*

to think of the presented issues in a slightly different way. For example, he is passionate about stopping gun violence. He showed a segment of the *Law & Order: SVU* episode "Infected," which was inspired by an article he had read in *Science*.<sup>1</sup> The episode

presented data from the article that indicated children exposed to gun violence are 2 to 3 times more likely to commit serious violence. The episode associated gun violence with an infectious disease. "Violence is the disease; guns are the virus," an SVU character says. "And we have an epidemic on our hands."

To portray how public storytelling can help us in our own lives, Dr Baer discussed an *ER* episode that referenced the association between human papilloma virus (HPV) and cervical cancer. Before and after the *ER* episode aired, the Kaiser Family Foundation surveyed *ER* viewers to determine if they knew of the HPV/cervical cancer link.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, the survey results showed a statistically significant increase in the proportion of viewers who were aware of HPV and could provide an accurate definition of HPV based on watching this episode of *ER*. The survey also determined the following points:

- 53% of viewers said they learned important health issues from *ER*.

- One-third of viewers obtained information that helped them with their family.
- One-seventh of viewers discussed what they had seen on *ER* with a doctor/health care provider.

Furthermore, with the Internet, medical writers have more tools to help with public storytelling. "The online world is a rich resource for your stories," he says. To illustrate, he presented BubbleTweet (available at [www.bubbletweet.com](http://www.bubbletweet.com)), a short (60 seconds or less) pop-up video that can be posted to Twitter. He has used BubbleTweet to help augment television show viewing. He played one such tweet he created for the *Law & Order: SVU* episode, "Witness," about violence against women in Congo, which is available at [bbltwt.com/chuk2](http://bbltwt.com/chuk2). Additionally, the episode received attention through a Huffington Post blog item coauthored by SVU actress Mariska Hargitay.<sup>3</sup>

Importantly, these methods provide actionable steps for viewers to learn about public health issues and

to help in their lives and the communities. In conclusion, Dr Baer said one can "harness storytelling to produce social change."

*Dr Julie Phelan is president of Biomedisys, Inc, a biomedical communications and strategy consulting boutique in Chicago, IL.*

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#### Special Feature:

**Listen to the Swanberg Address of Susan Aiello, DVM, ELS, while viewing her accompanying slide set.**

# 2012 CONFERENCE COVERAGE

## [SESSION SUMMARIES]

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### DOCUMENT QUALITY CONTROL: A QCER'S VIEW OF THE WORLD

#### Speaker

**Dianne De Jesus**

*Technical Editor, ICON Clinical Research, North Wales, PA*

#### By Kelly Schrank

In her presentation “Document Quality Control: A QCer’s View of the World,” Dianne De Jesus described herself as a technical editor who performs quality control (QC). She began her discussion with why regulatory documents need QC. When a writer has looked at a document for too long, a second set of eyes can catch errors. There is also a need for a new and objective look at documents in which there are potentially conflicting comments from multiple reviewers; part of her review is to make sure all comments are incorporated.

When she first started her job at ICON, she worked entirely in hard copy, but now that she works from home, she works with electronic copies. Her process, as she described it, is to “ensure a certain level of quality within a clinical document prior to delivery.” She QCs many types of documents, including clinical study reports, new drug applications, and integrated summaries of safety. Her two types of QCs are a content QC, which includes verification of scientific data (via a cross check between source documents and the working documents) and a technical editing QC, which includes style, formatting, grammar, usage, and spelling.

The writers provide a narrative map indicating the locations of the sources to help her perform the needed cross checks. In the process she currently follows, she conducts a document QC at three different stages: when it is a shell, at first draft, and at completion. In her experience, the level of QC needed decreases as a document moves through the process.

She walked through the checklist she follows via her PowerPoint slides. Her list includes many types of checks: “glaring mistakes/issues,” grammar, punctuation, consistency, compliance with style guide. She also performs many types of checks to compare different parts of the document: the abbreviations list against the synopsis, the schedule of assessments against the study activities, in-text tables against data source, in-text tables against data within the text, the table of contents against the text in the document. She also checks all the references for the tables and figures, checking the hyperlinks as needed.

Other documents she shared in her PowerPoint were her QC request form (which included information on the project, the deliverable, who is requesting the review, the due date, and additional directions or instructions) and her review tracking spreadsheet, which is provided to the company’s Quality Assurance team. She mentioned that the QA team audits the process from start to finish, including her participation; QA checks all of the documentation given to her, the checklist she uses to conduct her QC, and all of her edits and comments. For this reason, she is limited in her review to what the writer requests.

Despite the fact that she is responding to requests from writers for her assistance, she does have rejection criteria. If there are a certain number of errors on the first page or incomplete content, she can return it without doing the QC.

Many in the audience were surprised to hear that she did not use track changes to make corrections, even when completing a technical editing QC; all of her edits are documented in Microsoft Word’s comment feature. Though medical writers are not required to make her changes, she can verify whether they do through subsequent reviews.

*Kelly Schrank works from her home near Syracuse, NY, as a medical editor for Med Communications.*

#### Selected Tips and Tricks

- Upon first receipt, do a quick pass-through for glaring errors.
- Always do a spell check.
- Although QC is data-driven, try not to overlook the small details.
- When reviewing a newly hired author’s work for the first time, point out every edit (training opportunity).

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## FALSIFICATIONS AND RETRACTIONS

### Moderator and Speaker

#### Andrea Gwosdow, PhD

President, Gwosdow Associates Science Consultants, Arlington, MA

### Speakers

#### Rebecca Lew, PhD, CMPP

Senior Medical Writer, ProScribe Medical Communications, Melbourne, Australia

#### Kim E. Barrett, PhD

Dean of Graduate Studies, University of California, San Diego

### By Kelly A. Keating, PhD

“Something doesn't seem quite right here.” “This seems familiar.” “Why does the writing suddenly improve in this paragraph?” “Is the image in this figure distorted?” If as a medical writer and editor you have ever found yourself with these thoughts running through your head and then followed up by diplomatically making author inquiries, you can add “ethical detective” to your list of skills. Each speaker in this session offered advice on how to investigate and analyze issues such as these that you may encounter and that can contribute to a potential article retraction.

Andrea Gwosdow, PhD, quoted the *Merriam Webster Dictionary* definition of retraction as “to draw something back in.” In publication terms, a retracted article is one that has been removed from Medline after a journal issues a retraction notice. The journal's editor makes a retraction decision based on either error by the author or journal, or on the more serious reason of author misconduct. The journal retraction notice should explicitly state the retraction reason.

The speakers defined author misconduct as plagiarism (using someone else's text verbatim for example,

or even your own text as self-plagiarism—intentional or not) and falsification or fabrication of data and reporting it (changing or making up data to improve the results). Each speaker emphasized that retractions because of author misconduct matter for ethical reasons and because retracted papers continued to be cited in the literature, potentially leading to a false impression of the reproducibility or impact of a finding and biasing meta-analyses that include the data. Kim Barrett, PhD, and Vice-Chair of the Publications Committee for the American Physiological Society (APS), pointed out, “Intellectual honesty is an essential tenet of scientific life,” and science is an enterprise based on trust. Violation of that trust betrays the authors' colleagues, the journal, and the public, and after all the public's taxpayer dollars may have funded that research.

### Reasons for Retractions

Rebecca Lew, PhD, CMPP, in 2011 coauthored an article that quantified the factors contributing to retractions from Medline between 1966 and 2008.<sup>1</sup> The authors found that of 463 retractions, almost half (213) were because of author misconduct, and the most common misconduct reasons were plagiarism and falsification or fabrication of data.

Falsification can include digital manipulation of images such as blots or micrographs. Barrett cautioned that an author should not move, remove, introduce, obscure, or enhance any feature within an image. For example, an image of a blot should appear in an article exactly as captured in the laboratory, blemishes and all. Barrett said that manipulation of images, whether the author knows if image alteration is allowed or not, is the most prevalent type of misconduct seen for manuscripts submitted to APS journals. She reported that the actual number of misconduct cases

investigated by APS each year among about 8000 manuscripts received is small; APS projects there will be 161 investigations in 2012. Still, APS has observed an increasing number of cases, so there is a need to be vigilant. Barrett cited the risk factors in the publishing environment that are associated with violations of ethical policies of a journal: author inexperience/lack of mentoring on appropriate standards, the availability of software tools for figure manipulation, and the increased competition for positions and funding.

### Advice for Medical Writers

How can medical writers help their clients avoid retraction? Gwosdow's advice was to work in a collaborative spirit with clients to educate and inform, and thereby head off any tendency toward plagiarism or falsification. Sometimes the misconduct can be unintentional—a graduate student who is contributing data may not know that it is not permissible to erase small bits of debris or noise in an image—and an “innocent until proven guilty” approach is the most diplomatic. Medical writers should tread carefully and respectfully when corresponding with an author, asking questions without accusing to try to get to the bottom of any suspected misconduct.

Lew advocated for the medical writer to not perpetuate the problem. That is, be sure not to cite a retracted article. Retracted articles can be identified in PubMed by doing an advanced search, selecting “retracted publication” as the publication type, and combining with a general key word related to your manuscript to check that none of the manuscript's cited articles comes up in the search.

Medical communicators can use a checklist to help them handle a difficult situation the “RIGHT” way—a five-step model developed by AMWA ethics workshop leaders for

use by professional medical communicators:<sup>2</sup>

- Recognize the ethical situation.
- Investigate the facts and assumptions.
- Gauge the situation and decide.
- Handle the situation and implement the decision.
- Tailor the decision (evaluate and revise).

Gwosdow also suggested some questions to ask yourself as you encounter ethical issues:

- Who is involved in the ethical situation? Who will be affected by the decision?
- What are the relevant principles in the AMWA Code of Ethics?
- What are the conflicts of interest?
- What are all the possible courses of action and likely consequences of each?
- Who can or should help?
- What lessons can be learned?

Using this checklist and asking yourself these questions may help you

as a medical writer to educate your clients and help them avoid unintentional ethical lapses, or conversely to detect intentional ethical wrongdoings and decline to work with the client any longer. Lew suggested that medical writers can act as the final gatekeeper and by their diligence help protect themselves, their clients, and journals, and contribute to accuracy in the medical literature.

*Kelly A. Keating is a Science Editor/ Medical Writer at the Pharmaceutical Research Institute, Albany College of*

*Pharmacy and Health Sciences, in Albany, NY.*

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## Resources

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## SO YOU WANT TO WRITE A BOOK

### Speakers

**Debra Gordon, MS**

*President, GordonSquared, Inc,  
Williamsburg, VA*

**Alisa Bowman**

*Writer, Emmaus, PA*

### By Kelly Schrank

In introducing herself and her co-presenter, Debra Gordon was quick to point out that their session, "So You Want to Write a Book," would be focused on nonfiction. She and Alisa Bowman have contributed to more than 50 nonfiction books in the past

15 years. Gordon began the presentation with her 10 myths of writing a book (see sidebar). One big myth is that you'll make a lot of money, and Gordon dispelled this by saying that writing a book is not an easy or quick way to make a living. The two of them have found, however, that providing your services to an author can be more lucrative.

One such service is writing book proposals on behalf of an expert on a particular topic. For a 50-page proposal that includes the table of contents and some information on potential content, you may be able to negotiate an \$8,000 fee. If the proposal were accepted by a publisher, and you wrote the book with the co-author, you might be able to make \$70,000 for

about 5 months of work. This is much better than the royalties you might receive if you wrote a book yourself. Both presenters mentioned throughout the session that, in contrast to the peer-reviewed medical literature, ghostwriting is an accepted practice in nonfiction book publishing, especially in bestsellers. Gordon advised attendees to get an agent; even after paying 15% to the agent, you will make more than if you had negotiated the deal yourself.

Other practical information that came out of Gordon's discussion included the importance of setting goals for the project by chapters (for example, write a 6,000-word chapter each month), the evolution of self-publishing from "being something

you'd be embarrassed to tell your mother about to being quite lucrative," and the vital skill of marketing. It doesn't matter how cool your topic is or how good of a writer you are if you don't know how to sell the book.

Gordon also discussed the elements of a book proposal, with some tips to make them more effective:

1. Overview: must sell the idea (ie, why the book should be written, why you're the person to write it, and what your "platform" is).
2. Table of contents (TOC): must have enough detail to sell the book.
3. Sample chapter: may be optional if the TOC is detailed enough.
4. Marketing plan: must show how you are going to market your book, ideally with the help of a publicist you hire.
5. Description of your audience: shows that you have one.
6. List of some of your competitors: shows that there is already a market for the type of book, as publishers resist going into completely new genres.
7. Names of others willing to write a foreword or back cover blurb for your book: shows that you have connections and can attract others to your project.

Alisa Bowman began her part of the presentation with a story of moving from one dream job to another. She was a runner writing for *Runner's World*, where she said she was paid to run marathons. Now she is a full-time writer working only on word-of-mouth advertising. Her presentation was based on her past mistakes, and was titled "How to Not Write a Book in 13 Easy Steps." In discussing why you should not spend your advance on a home improvement project, she explained how advance payments are made. The advance is paid in installments, usually three or four, depending on whether the book will be published first in hard cover or immediately as a paperback. One check

comes after all the paperwork for the deal is signed (which often takes substantially longer than you think it should), another check comes after the manuscript has been submitted and accepted by the publisher (right before publication), and then another check comes after publication. If there is a hard cover and paperback, there is one check after hard cover publication and another after paperback. If you are thinking of publishing a book with graphics or an index, the costs for having these prepared also comes out of the advance.

It is especially important to deliver a manuscript at the agreed-upon length. Bowman explained how there are professionals at the publisher who decide the pricing for your book based on its length, the competition, and the price points that will entice your audience. If the publishing professionals say you need to write a 150-page book for your audience and price point, then you need to provide a 150-page book. If you don't, the publisher could cancel the deal.

In keeping with Gordon's advice that it's not enough to be a good writer, Bowman mentioned the importance of marketing, entrepreneurship, and interpersonal skills in being able to work as a freelance book author or co-author.

Questions at the end of the session generated even more advice. When asked how to break into the field, the speakers suggested reaching out to people you work with to see if anyone is interested in writing a book. If someone you know is doing an interesting study, ask the author if he or she would like to write a book with your help. Bowman also discussed how easy it is to publish an eBook. Amazon, for

example, has tutorials to walk you through how to put an eBook on its site ([kdp.amazon.com/self-publishing/signin](http://kdp.amazon.com/self-publishing/signin)). Or you can use your own website to post the eBook, then find **affiliates** to help you promote it.

*Kelly Schrank works from her home near Syracuse, NY, as a medical editor for Med Communications.*

## Glossary

### Affiliate:

Someone that helps you promote your book through their communities (via a blog, website, Facebook, Twitter, or other social media); if the promotion garners a sale, you pay them a set fee for each sale.

### Author Platform:

From Christina Katz in *Get Known Before the Book Deal*

"A platform communicates your expertise to others. It includes your Web presence, any public speaking you do, the classes you teach, the media contacts you've established, the articles you've published, and any other means you currently have for making your name and your future books known to a viable readership."

## Debra Gordon's 10 Myths of Writing Nonfiction

1. You will make lots of money.
2. You should write the book first, then find a publisher.
3. You don't need no stinkin' agent.
4. A cover letter and a table of contents is all you need to sell your book to a publisher.
5. Ghostwriting is verboten.
6. It's OK to write the proposal for free for your author; if the book sells, then you'll be paid.
7. Doctors/co-authors are easy to work with.
8. You should block off a year to write a book.
9. All you need to sell your book is great content.
10. It's easy to sell a book these days.

# 2012 CONFERENCE COVERAGE

## [ANNUAL AWARDS]

### SWANBERG AWARD: SUSAN E. AIELLO, DVM, ELS

By Jane Krauhs, PhD, ELS(D)

Chair, 2012 Swanberg Award Committee

The 2012 recipient of the Harold Swanberg Distinguished Service Award is Susan Aiello, DVM, ELS. This prestigious award, named for one of AMWA's founders, is presented to "an active member who has made distinguished contributions to medical communication or rendered unusual and distinguished services to the medical profession."

Susan's contributions to medical communication are many, and her selection for the Swanberg Award particularly recognizes her major contribution to developing the new AMWA curriculum. She has also been active in the Board of Editors in the Life Sciences (BELS), currently serving as its president. As editor of *The Merck Veterinary Manual*, a veterinary medical textbook, she has contributed substantially to communication in veterinary medicine.

Susan was selected for the Swanberg Award this year because she played a leading role in developing and establishing AMWA's new curriculum, as well as in developing the science certificate that preceded the new curriculum. Providing "educational resources" in support of excellence in medical communication is an important part of AMWA's mission, and our educational program is an exceptional resource. In 2010, AMWA established an updated and greatly expanded certificate program. Susan chaired the Committee on Expanded Certificate Program, and in a nomination for the Swanberg Award she is credited with having the "foresight, dedication, and perseverance" needed to organize a new curriculum and bring it to fruition.

In 2000, after she had been an annual conference roundtable leader for several years, Susan led one credit workshop; in 2009, she led four credit

workshops. She has also led workshops at chapter conferences and on-site workshops. She has taught about 10 different workshops, some of which she developed. In 2005, Susan became an AMWA Fellow and received the Golden Apple Award for excellence in education. From 2007 to 2009, she was Annual Conference Workshop Coordinator.

Susan has served AMWA in many areas besides education. Her sense of humor and her creativity and vision have long distinguished her as an AMWA leader. In the Swanberg Committee's discussions, "charisma" was mentioned as one of her qualities. She has served on the Executive Committee as Awards Administrator twice and on numerous other AMWA task forces and committees, including ones to award student scholarships and medical book awards. At annual conferences, she has coordinated klatches and roundtables, been an open session panelist, and led water aerobics. She has also been a proof-reader for the *AMWA Journal*.

Susan has taught communication courses in other settings besides AMWA, including the Writers' Workshop for the Harvard Medical School's Department of Continuing Education.

The story of how Susan transitioned from veterinary practice to being a full-time medical communicator is told in a member profile in the *AMWA Journal*.<sup>1</sup> She developed extraordinary skills in publications management when she worked for Merck & Co., Inc., from 1988 to 2001. She managed the print and electronic publication of *The Merck Veterinary Manual*, which had more than 400 authors and peer reviewers, from development to production. An Editor in the Life Sciences since 1991,



Jane Krauhs, PhD, ELS(D) (left), presents the Swanberg Award to Susan E. Aiello, DVM, ELS. Photo by D. Durgin Photography.

Susan has been a member of the BELS Executive Council since 1999. She became president of the organization in 2011.

As a freelance editor and writer from 2001 to 2011, Susan edited medical textbooks and health-related trade books, and she wrote and edited the medical content of websites on geriatrics and veterinary medicine, in addition to completing many other projects in writing, editing, and teaching. In 2011, she resumed editorship of *The Merck Veterinary Manual*.

In her reply to the letter notifying her that she had been selected for this award, Susan wrote, "AMWA has been a significant part of my life for many, many years...To be recognized for contributions to the profession is truly over the top!"

*The 2012 Swanberg Award Committee included Barbara Gastel, MD, ELS(H); Douglas Haneline, PhD; Larry Liberti, MS, RPh; Marianne Mallia, ELS; and Michele Vivirito.*

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1. Eisenpreis B. Member profile: Susan Aiello. *AMWA J.* 2011;26(4):189-190.

## AMWA AWARDS FELLOWSHIPS TO THREE MEMBERS IN 2012

By Thomas Gegeny, MS, ELS

*Chair, 2012 AMWA Fellowship Committee*

Each year, AMWA may recognize up to three members for significant contributions to the goals and activities of the association. AMWA Fellowships are awarded to active members, typically those with more than 5 years of service and activity. This year, the Fellowship Committee nominated three outstanding members to the AMWA Board of Directors to consider for Fellowship. All three candidates were awarded this honor because of their contributions and activities that have furthered the mission and work of AMWA.

### **TAMARA BALL, MD**

Tami joined AMWA in 2004 and immediately became involved nationally as part of a chapter revitalization task force. This work coincided with her substantial efforts to revive the Michigan Chapter, which was at risk (at that time) of becoming defunct. She went on to serve as that chapter's president in 2007-2008. In the relatively short time since she joined AMWA, Tami has made remarkable contributions both nationally and at the chapter level. Tami has been a session presenter at AMWA's annual conference, including leading workshops and breakfast roundtables. In addition, she has served several terms on the Executive Committee (EC) and has been a member of many committees in areas such as annual book awards, educational technology, and leadership training.

### **FAITH REIDENBACH, ELS, CMPP**

In the little more than a decade since she joined AMWA (in 2001), Faith has made an indelible mark on AMWA through noteworthy contributions

in the areas of publications, website/technology (including the Freelance Directory), and the annual conference. She has served on the EC in the departments of Publications, Web and Internet Technology, and Awards. Particularly in the areas of publications and technology, Faith has undertaken challenging projects. A prime example of this is Faith's work in 2010 to establish the *AMWA Journal Charter*, which clearly delineates the roles and responsibilities of the *AMWA Journal* and its parent organization/publisher. The charter now serves as a cornerstone document for AMWA's flagship publication. Faith has also contributed regularly to the *AMWA Journal* itself, has led sessions at the annual conference, and served on AMWA's Certification Task Force in 2009-2010 and the Constitution and Bylaws Committee in 2011-2012.

### **CHRISTINE WOGAN, MS, ELS**

An AMWA member since 1989, Chris has distinguished herself through long-time service in the Southwest Chapter, first as treasurer and later as president. Nationally, Chris has distinguished herself through numerous activities at the annual conference and her service on the EC (Awards Administrator, 2010-2012), as well as 3 years on the Budget & Finance Committee. She has also served as a peer reviewer and article contributor for the *AMWA Journal*. In 2010, Chris was honored with the President's Award to recognize her contributions to AMWA.

*The 2012 Fellowship Committee members included Kevin Flynn, MA; Bart Harvey, MD, PhD; Donna Miceli, BS; Peggy Robinson, BSc, ELS; and Victoria White, MA, ELS.*



*Tamara Ball, MD, (left); Faith Reidenbach, ELS, CMPP; and Christine Wogan, MS ELS, were honored with AMWA fellowship.*

*Photo by D. Durgin Photography.*

## PEGGY BOE—WINNER OF AMWA'S GOLDEN APPLE AWARD FOR 2012

By Sharon Nancekivell

*Administrator of Education, 2011–2012*

Peggy Boe, RN, is this year's recipient of the Golden Apple Award, the highest honor an AMWA workshop leader can achieve.

Established in 1986, this prestigious award honors workshop leaders who have demonstrated consistent excellence in teaching in AMWA's educational program. Each year, the Education Committee selects the Golden Apple winner after a thorough review of the teaching records of all workshop leaders who meet the criteria for the award. To be eligible, a workshop leader must have taught at least 12 workshops at AMWA's annual or chapter conferences and maintained an overall score of 4.4 (out of a possible 5.0) on participants' workshop evaluations for all workshops he or she has taught. Other criteria considered include the difficulty of the content and the diversity of workshops taught, the number of new workshops developed, and the number of years the leader has volunteered to teach these workshops.

Since 2004, Peggy has taught 26 workshops at annual and chapter conferences throughout the United States. The committee was particularly impressed with the number of credit workshops Peggy has developed—five—two within her first 3

years of membership in AMWA. The committee also noted the level of difficulty of the workshops and their complex, detailed nature; for example, Electronic Technical Document, IND in eCTD Format, Summarizing Clinical Efficacy Data for an NDA (and its companion, Summarizing Clinical Safety Data for an NDA), and Ethics of Communicating Regulated Drug Development Activities. Her workshops form a core portion of AMWA's Regulatory and Research Specialty Certificate program. One committee member summed up Peggy's contributions most aptly: "Peggy's generous sharing of her expertise and personal experience with regulatory documents and processes has benefited all those who've taken her workshops and greatly strengthened AMWA's educational program in the regulatory arena."

Developing and teaching workshops have not been Peggy's only contributions to AMWA. She has also generously shared her expertise and experience as a speaker for open sessions and a breakfast roundtable leader at annual conferences, and as a regular contributor to the *AMWA Journal*, for which she serves as section editor of Regulatory Insights.

In another life, Peggy was a registered nurse with specialty certification in perioperative nursing. About 15 years ago, she entered the medical writing profession, gaining diverse experience in regulatory medical writing, editing, training, consulting, and entrepreneurial business management. She is currently the associate director of medical writing for Boehringer Ingelheim.

On behalf of AMWA, the Education Committee is honored to add Peggy Boe's name to the list of distinguished recipients of the Golden Apple Award. We thank her for her outstanding contributions to AMWA's educational program.

*The 2012 Golden Apple Award Committee included Susan Aiello, DVM, ELS; Jenny Grodberg, PhD, RAC; Cindy Hamilton, PharmD, ELS; Sue Hudson; Marianne Mallia, ELS; Jennifer Maybin, MA; Sharon Nancekivell, MA (chair); and Karen Steinhilber, MLS.*



*Peggy Boe, RN, recipient of the 2012 Golden Apple Award.*

*Photo by T. Walker Photography*

## PRESIDENT'S AWARD: BARBARA ZIMMERMAN, PHD

The AMWA President's Award is presented each year to a member who has made significant contributions at the chapter or national level and has never served on the Executive Committee. AMWA's 2011-2012 President Barbara Snyder selected Barbara Zimmerman, PhD, to receive the 2012 President's Award in recognition of her contributions to

the Rocky Mountain chapter (serving multiple terms as secretary and president), to the annual conference (as a roundtable leader, Coffee Klatch leader, open session chair), and to AMWA on the national level (serving multiple terms as a delegate to the Board of Directors, and participating on several task forces and committees).



*Photo by T. Walker Photography*

## STUDENT SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENT: ALYSSA WU-ZHANG

By Qing Zhou, PhD

Chair, 2011-2012 Student Scholarship Committee

Alyssa Wu-Zhang, a doctoral student at the University of California, San Diego, is the recipient of the 2012 Annual Conference Student Scholarship sponsored by University of the Sciences in Philadelphia. The scholarship provided Alyssa with funds to cover the costs of attending the annual conference and participating in three workshops. The scholarship recipient was honored at the Sablack Awards Dinner at the conference.

Alyssa's interest in medical writing stems from a deep appreciation for the beauty that lies in the order and objectivity of science and her innate affinity for writing and editing. A PhD student in biomedical sciences, Alyssa originally wanted to become a professor. However, she later realized that what had attracted her most to the PhD program was not doing research but rather achieving scientific clarity and mastery of knowledge at the level of a professor. Through her experience in graduate school—in research, in teaching, and in communicating science to other scientists, whether orally or in written form, formally or informally—Alyssa realized that, despite having achieved a fair amount of success in bench research, her interests really lie in applying her scientific expertise in medical communication. To further explore her interest and talent in this field, she applied for and won a year-long National Science Foundation graduate fellowship in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics education, during which she developed a novel, inquiry-based high school biology curriculum by using key scientific concepts from her thesis research. She also gained experience in science editing as a contract biomedical subject-expert editor for American Journal Experts. Now, as she is poised to defend her thesis, it has become clear to her that a career

in medical communication would make a wonderful marriage of her background in science and her talent for writing and editing.

Alyssa first encountered AMWA on the Science Careers website of the journal *Science*, where AMWA was listed as a professional society under "Careers in Medical Writing: Resources." Then, at a local life sciences networking event, a medical writer advised Alyssa to join AMWA after learning about her interest in medical writing. Alyssa joined AMWA as a student member this past spring, and when she learned about the scholarship from the AMWA Conference Connector, she decided to apply. "I realized what a great opportunity attending the conference would be for me as a young scientist who wanted to launch her medical writing career," Alyssa says. Also, "being a student, I was not sure I could afford to attend the conference and pay for workshops, so I decided to apply to the scholarship and see whether that difficulty could be overcome," adds Alyssa.

Alyssa was very grateful when she learned that she had won this year's student scholarship. "If I had not received this scholarship, I don't think I would have been able to attend the conference," Alyssa says. She viewed the AMWA conference as providing unparalleled opportunities to build an extensive network of peers, to learn from experienced colleagues, and to participate in workshops for credits toward an Essential Skills certificate. To this end, Alyssa signed up for three Essential Skills workshops: Sentence Structure and Patterns, Punctuation

for Clarity and Style, and Effective Paragraphing. She also planned to purchase the newest self-study module, *Tables and Graphs*.

Through the AMWA conference, Alyssa sought to expand her understanding of the field and jumpstart a rewarding career in medical communication. After graduation, Alyssa would like to become a medical writer



Alyssa Wu-Zhang (center) accepts her scholarship award from Dan Benau, PhD, Director of the Biomedical Writing Program at the University of the Sciences in Philadelphia; and Qing Zhou, Chair of the Student Scholarship Committee.

Photo by T. Walker Photography

in the pharmaceutical or biotech industry. She is particularly interested in applying her advanced scientific training to writing about complex clinical trial data. She believes that she would enjoy a project management position in which she can collaborate with many different people in a company to help shepherd a manuscript from scientific conception to submission.

*The Annual Conference Student Scholarship Committee included: Mary Whitman, PhD, Beth Ann Garni-Wagner, PhD, Karen Potvin Klein, MA, ELS, Kelly Keating, PhD, and Lili Fox Vélez, PhD.*

## 2012 ERIC W. MARTIN AWARD WINNER: JOSHUA TOMPKINS

By Paul Tom<sup>a</sup> and Leslie E. Neistadt, ELS<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Intern, The Hughston Foundation, Columbus, GA, and <sup>b</sup>Member of the Eric W. Martin

Award for Excellence in Medical Writing Committee

The Eric W. Martin Award honors excellence in medical writing; it is given in recognition of outstanding articles that were written and published by members of AMWA in the previous year. This year, one author won the award for articles submitted in the professional (medical) audience category and the category for the public or health care consumer.

Joshua Tompkins is a veteran science and health journalist whose work has appeared in *The New York Times*, the *Los Angeles Times*, *Popular Science*, *Men's Journal*, and other publications. Tompkins is also a medical student. His winning articles about this time in his life—*Money for Nothing? The Problem of the Board-Exam Coaching Industry*, and *Confessions of a Middle-Aged Medical Student*—were the highest scoring entries in both categories.

Following is an interview with Tompkins.

**Q:** What is your educational background?

**A:** I had intended to become a physician, but in college I was hopelessly distracted by all the fascinations of the liberal arts world. I was encouraged to pursue writing and obtained an undergraduate degree from the University of Pennsylvania in romance languages. In 2006, I enrolled in a postbaccalaureate premedical program, which led to attending the Keck School of Medicine of the University of Southern California. I will graduate next May.

**Q:** How long have you been writing about science?

**A:** I was an editor at Los Angeles magazine for many years and did a little of everything. After that, I became a freelance writer specializing in science and medicine.

**Q:** What inspired you to go to medical school? Why did you decide to attend medical school at age 38?

**A:** Writing about medicine made me want to be a part of it, and I put off the decision for years. I wasn't familiar with the postbaccalaureate programs available for older applicants, but they offer the necessary courses and application advice.

**Q:** What is the most difficult part of attending med school?

**A:** The hours are horrendous, the academic requirements are intense, and you need plenty of energy to carry you through the 40 to 80 hours per week. In the hospital, the anxiety of avoiding mistakes keeps you alert.

**Q:** Is medical school what you expected?

**A:** I expected most of it. I became fascinated with gross anatomy but started to despise it because you're hunting for tiny, difficult-to-find anatomical structures. I'm not good at dissection and felt frustrated when professors would peer into my team's cadaver and pinpoint the structures so quickly.

**Q:** Why did you choose psychiatry?

**A:** I chose psychiatry because I always enjoy talking with people and because nothing intrigues me as much as human behavior. My favorite character on M\*A\*S\*H was Dr. Sidney Freedman, a psychiatrist, who would help people feel better by conversing with them.

**Q:** Will you open your own practice? Will you continue writing?

**A:** I'm going to stay in academia. A private practice is appealing, but it may be a little isolating. I'll be a resident for 4 busy years, but I'll continue writing, and my writing will now be much more informed.

**Q:** What do you do in your spare time?

**A:** I don't have much spare time, but I read anything nonmedical or watch *Frasier* reruns when I get the opportunity. It's a well-written, funny program that shows an overeducated windbag and his brother—both psychiatrists, by the way—making fools of themselves.

**Q:** If a fellow journalist were to ask you for advice about attending medical school in your 30s, what would you say?

**A:** I would tell them to be ready because it is 10 times harder than they can imagine. You're jumping through hoops, volunteering, and doing research. This takes time and dedication to accomplish, which means the only thing harder than medical school is probably joining the military. You will be physically and mentally tired all the time. Then, applying for residency is like applying for med school all over again. You have to deal with letters, interviews, and constantly being evaluated in a highly competitive atmosphere.

**Q:** Is it worth it in the end?

**A:** It is worth it despite the constant fatigue and frustration, but I sometimes ask "Now why did I do this?" However, all I need is a good night's sleep and I'm back to my old self.

The members of the Eric Martin Award committee included: Norman Grossblatt, ELS(D), Katharine O'Moore-Klopf, ELS; Leslie Neistadt, ELS; and Christine Wogan, MS, ELS.



Photo by T. Walker Photography