

SOUTHWEST CHAPTER NEWS

April 2002

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May Meeting: Third Annual Career Roundtables Meeting

Wednesday, May 15, 2002, in Houston, Texas

The Third Annual Career Roundtables Meeting will be held Wednesday, May 15, 2002, in the private banquet room of Baba Yega restaurant, an antique-filled bungalow located in Houston's historic Montrose district. Please join us for this springtime event and enjoy good food, good atmosphere, and good company while learning about an important aspect of biomedical communication. More casual and interactive than a lecture, each roundtable will consist of a brief presentation by an expert in an area of biomedical communication followed by a question-and-answer period and discussion with roundtable participants. If you know someone who might like to join AMWA, this event makes an ideal introductory meeting.

Participants will choose one of four roundtables. Please make your reservations early to ensure your first choice.

1. Finding Your Market: Starting and Running a Freelance Medical Writing Business, with Lorraine Cherry, PhD. Starting a successful freelance business involves (a) identifying what you do well, and (b) finding customers who need you and (very important) have the money to pay you. This roundtable will give pointers on conceptualizing a medical writing business, setting up an effective marketing campaign, and making the business work on a day-to-day basis.

Dr. Cherry is the current president of the Southwest Chapter of AMWA and has run a successful freelance medical writing business for 6 years. She received a PhD in genetics from the University of California at Berkeley and has held faculty positions at The Uni-

versity of Texas M. D. Anderson Cancer Center and The University of Texas-Houston Health Science Center.

2. Get Them the Money: Editing Grant Proposals, with Maureen E. Goode, PhD, ELS. Editing grant proposals is one of the most important things editors can do to help their clients succeed in today's competitive research climate. However, many editors are not familiar with grant proposals, and most grant agencies ask for clear, persuasive proposals without telling authors how to write them. We'll discuss the parts of a typical grant proposal's research plan (the part that describes the proposed study), some common mistakes novice grant writers make, how to sell the study, and what reviewers look for. Dr. Goode is Education Coordinator for Scientific Publications and a scientific editor in the Department of Scientific Publications at M. D. Anderson Cancer Center. She has edited grant proposals for 12 years and has given talks and workshops on grant writing at M. D. Anderson and the National Cancer Institute.

3. Unintended Humor in Medical Writing, with Susan Siefert, ELS, CBC. "Medical Misspeak and Miswrite" can strike unexpectedly at any time or place and leave your funny bone in a tangled and tortured state. Join this roundtable discussion to share classic examples of why work should be reviewed before it goes to press. Please bring your favorites so that we can all enjoy them. Susan Siefert is supervisor of medical writing at Cyberonics, Inc. She has been laughing at unintended humor since she began to read, which was long ago. The Southwestern AMWA Chapter is her fourth AMWA home because she has moved a lot. Her somewhat checkered past includes time served as President, Ohio Valley AMWA Chapter, and on

The logo for the American Medical Writers Association (AMWA) features the letters 'AMWA' in a large, stylized, bold font. Below the letters, the words 'AMERICAN MEDICAL WRITERS ASSOCIATION' are written in a smaller, all-caps, sans-serif font.

AMERICAN
MEDICAL WRITERS
ASSOCIATION

the AMWA Executive Committee as Administrator of Membership and, most recently, Administrator of the Annual Conference in Norfolk, Virginia.

4. How Far Should You Go? Setting Editorial Priorities, with Christine Wogan, MS, ELS. How do you decide how much editing is enough? If you were given 4 hours to edit an author's manuscript, what would your priorities be? Would those priorities be different if you were given 4 days instead of 4 hours? We will look at several levels-of-edit systems that have been devised to address these kinds of questions, and consider the controversial—and occasionally contradictory—assumptions made in trying to use such systems to set editorial policy. Chris Wogan is a scientific editor in the Department of Scientific Publications at M. D. Anderson Cancer Center. Her previous forays into developing editorial priorities have involved writing and editing for the Medical Sciences Division at NASA's Johnson Space Center and developing research proposals with investigators at MIT, Harvard Medical School, and Brandeis University.

Baba Yega restaurant has planned a delicious menu. A salad of mixed field greens with sesame vinaigrette will be served, followed by a buffet with your choice of entrée: chicken in a mushroom and marsala cream sauce served with garlic mashed potatoes and julienne vegetables or a vegetarian option of penne pasta in a fresh pomodoro tomato sauce topped with grilled Portobello mushrooms and seasonal vegetables. Dessert will be a *tres leches* cake layered with fresh strawberries. Coffee, tea, and soft drinks are included in the price of the meal. A cash bar will also be available.

We will also conduct our annual chapter business meeting at this gathering, including voting on the new chapter officers. If you are unable to attend, please use the absentee ballot printed on page 3 to vote. Please mail it by Monday, May 7 to Lorraine Cherry, PhD, 5380 West 34th Street, #329, Houston, TX 77092.

We will gather at 6 pm for socializing, with dinner and the business meeting beginning at 6:30 pm. The price is \$26 for AMWA members and \$28 for guests and nonmembers. Baba Yega is located at 2607 Grant Street (2 blocks east of Montrose Boulevard and between Westheimer and Fairview).

Directions to Baba Yega:

From the Museum District, travel north on Montrose and pass Westheimer. The second street after Westheimer is Missouri Street; turn right and go 2 blocks. The restaurant is at the intersection of Missouri and Grant.

From I-10 (the Heights area), travel south on Montrose and pass Fairview. The second street after Fairview is Missouri Street; turn left and go 2 blocks. The restaurant is located at the intersection of Missouri and Grant. For more detailed directions, please call the restaurant (713) 522-0042.

News from New Mexico: March Meeting with Book Author

Nancy Joste, MD, was the guest speaker for a New Mexico AMWA meeting on March 20. She discussed her experiences as co-author of the newly published book, *Abnormal Pap Smears: What Every Woman Needs to Know* (Prometheus Books). Joste is Director of Cytopathology at UNM Health Sciences Center and at TriCore Reference Laboratories. She is also an associate professor of pathology at the UNM School of Medicine.

Joste also presented an overview of conditions that can be detected with Pap smears and reviewed Pap smear technology. The evening meeting, open to the public, was held at Page One, an Albuquerque independent bookstore. New Mexico Regional Director, Janet Yagoda Shagam, chose a public format for the meeting to help increase community awareness of AMWA and provide the public with access to expert information on the topic of Pap smears.

The book is currently the only one of its kind, providing women with in-depth but easily understood information on Pap smears and the health factors that an abnormal Pap smear may reflect, including cervical cancer, dysplasia (precancerous lesions), or human papillomavirus. Each year, nearly 4 million women have abnormal Pap smear results. Joste said that she and her co-author, Lynda Rushing, MD, decided to write the book because women often find little more than oversimplified pamphlets available when told they have abnormal Pap smear results.

Rushing is a pathology instructor at Harvard and Tufts Medical Schools. She is also medical director of gynecologic pathology and cytology at Pathology Services Inc. in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Joste explained that she and Rushing drew on their experience from daily immersion in the topic and created a personal feel for the book by interviewing as many patients as possible. She said that they first looked for an agent, but later found they preferred the process of locating a publisher themselves. They approached publishers with a sample chapter and book outline and found their publisher after focusing their search on those whose topics include women's health. The process has taken about 4 years from the book's inception to publishing, Joste said.

She explained that as first-time authors, they found many helpful marketing suggestions in the book *How To Get Happily Published*, by J. Appelbaum (HarperCollins). One especially helpful item was a checklist to help authors ensure a book's inclusion on appropriate book lists as well as distribution to professional associations, libraries, and institutions. "Writers need to take the initiative in marketing," she said, adding that they have done so and are pleased with their book's overall sales and the local press coverage they have received.

The Popular Media as Public Health Catalyst: Distinguished Lecture Draws Members and Non-members Alike!

On Wednesday, March 20, AMWA Southwest sponsored a Mexican dinner catered by Pico's, followed by a lecture by ZoAnn Dreyer, MD, entitled "The Popular Media as Public Health Catalyst," at The University of Texas–Houston School of Public Health. Dr. Dreyer is an Assistant Professor of Pediatrics at Baylor College of Medicine and Director of the Texas Children's Cancer Center Ambulatory Service Center at Texas Children's Hospital. Her 1 minute, 45 second medical vignettes, which appear as "Medical File" reports on Houston's FOX 26 Television News, are prompted by a simple question: How can we educate the public about this medical issue?

Dr. Dreyer described the many media forms that mix medicine and entertainment, such as medical fiction novels, tabloids, news magazines, television dramas, and television/radio talk shows. Regardless of the form, the purveyor of information bears responsibility for differentiating fiction from nonfiction and should clarify shifts from medical facts to fictional accounts. Also, in "targeting the consumer," reporters should value accuracy of information over commercial appeal, and medical accuracy must take precedence over profit. Dr. Dreyer's own attention-getting television reports are designed to attract an audience and are written at the fourth- or fifth-grade reading level so that they can be easily understood. She avoids an approach that would do more to advertise a medical product than to inform the public.

Dr. Dreyer reviewed several examples of provocative health issues over the past several years that prompted media

mania, describing the emergence of HIV/AIDS in the 1980s as "a journalist's dream" because of the opportunities for sensationalism. Such exploitation was a public disservice, of course; inaccurate reporting on the part of unreliable sources led to panic. Among the many myths that have been created by the media was that "super-organisms" such as flesh-eating bacteria, represent a substantial health risk. Reporting rare, isolated cases as "medical news" can give the public a false impression of high risk.

In addition, the "slant" with which a story is reported can lead to modification of medical practice, depending on the sources and statistics quoted. Dr. Dreyer stated that a "reliable source" employs scientifically sound reporting (validates information with legitimate sources of medical information), avoids sensationalism, avoids creating false hope, uses sound bytes responsibly, and proceeds with caution. It's better, she said, to be accurate when *first* reporting the story. In summary, a reporter of medical news must be entertaining, must be accurate, must interpret data carefully, and must focus on responsibility rather than profitability.

Attendees viewed two of Dr. Dreyer's medical vignettes: one educating the public on the spread of anthrax through the mail and another on the protective effect of the CD28 antigen in a person who has had HIV for many years. The lecture was followed by a question-and-answer session.



Electronic Newsletter Well Received

The AMWA Southwest Chapter newsletter (in PDF format) is now available electronically via the chapter website (www.amwasouthwest.org). An e-mail announcement is sent to chapter members directing them to access the latest newsletter online. Last month, shortly after the newsletter was "sent," recipients were asked for feedback regarding the online newsletter.

The majority of responses (85%) were in favor of the new format for reasons as varied as convenience, saving the chapter money on postage and production, and even saving paper. The remaining 15% of responders preferred to continue receiving the newsletter by traditional mail.

Therefore, the chapter will continue to produce the newsletter electronically. However, a limited number of hard copies will still be produced for members who prefer to receive the newsletter by mail. If you would prefer to continue receiving the newsletter by mail, please contact Thomas Gegeny (tom@centerforaids.org or 713-527-8219).

Absentee Ballot

Please mail this ballot by Monday, May 7 to
Lorraine Cherry, PhD
5380 West 34th Street, #329
Houston, TX 77092.

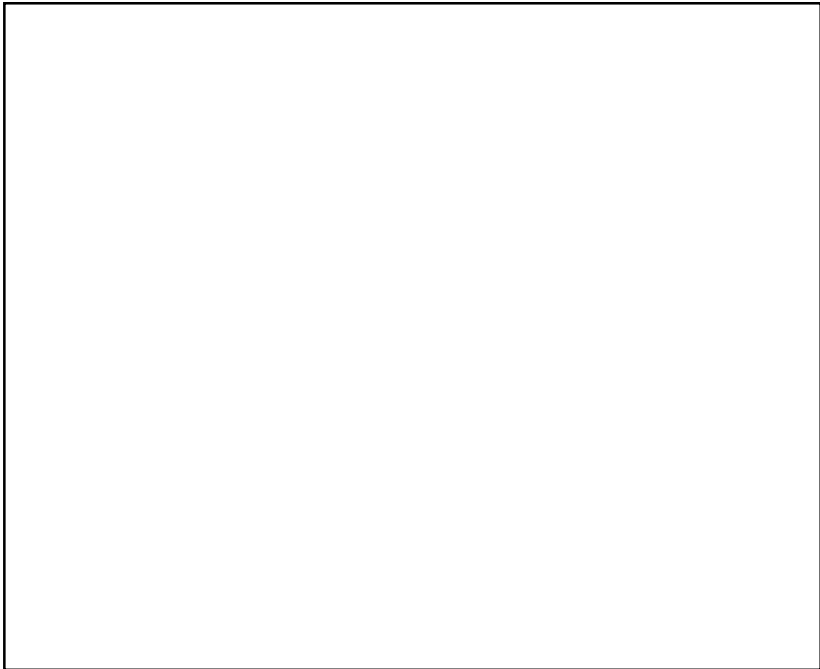
Officer candidates for 2002–2003

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- Program Chair • Kate Ó Súilleabháin
- Assistant Program Chair • Elisabeth Wann, PhD
- Treasurer • Chris Wogan, ELS
- Secretary • Dee Ann Bongiovanni, RN
- Newsletter Editor • Natasha Teixeira
- Director-at-Large • Jennifer Newcomb Fernandez, PhD
- Director-at-Large • Susan Siefert, ELS
- Director-at-Large • Laurel Prokop, ELS

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Meeting Registration Form

Third Annual Career Roundtables

Baba Yega Restaurant
May 15, 2002
6:00–8:00 p.m.

Registrant(s)

Name: _____

Daytime Phone: _____

Guest Name(s): _____

Entree

Please mark your choice.

Chicken marsala _____

Vegetarian penne pasta _____

_____ member(s) X \$26 = \$ _____

_____ guest(s) X \$28 = \$ _____

Roundtable

Please mark your 1st choice with "1" and your second choice with "2."

Freelance Medical Writing _____

Editing Grant Proposals _____

Unintended Humor _____

Setting Editorial Priorities _____

Please RSVP by May 8. Send check payable to AMWA Southwest and reservation form to:

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Houston, TX 77009