

SOUTHWEST CHAPTER NEWS

March 2002

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March Meeting: *The Popular Media as Public Health Catalyst* Wednesday, March 20, 2002, in Houston, Texas

The popular media (e.g., radio, television, and Internet) are often accessed for entertainment, but also can be powerful tools for communication. This is especially true in the field of public health, where the success of an intervention such as early detection of breast or prostate cancer depends on effective, far-reaching public awareness and education. ZoAnn Dreyer, MD, is a unique physician who is able to fashion her clinical expertise into effective medical reporting aimed at health care consumers. Dr. Dreyer will discuss her experiences as a practicing physician who works with a major metropolitan television news program to produce health segments aimed at informing the public about important health and safety issues. She will explain the processes involved, the role this type of work plays in public health, and how her own clinical experiences influence her reporting.

Dr. Dreyer is an Assistant Professor of Pediatrics at Baylor College of Medicine and Medical Director for the Texas Children's Cancer Center Ambulatory Service at Texas Children's Hospital. Her appointments and honors include being Medical Director for the Ronald McDonald House of Houston, President of the Gulf Coast Hematology Society, and an American Cancer Society Fellow. Dr. Dreyer received her medical degree from the University of California's Davis School of Medicine and did her postgraduate training at Baylor College of Medicine in Pediatrics and Hematology-Oncology. She has published more than 20 articles and 7 book chapters on a wide range of topics in pediatric oncology and cardiology. Dr. Dreyer is also a medical reporter for Houston's FOX 26 television news "Medical File" reports.

This lecture, which begins at 6:30 p.m., is a free event sponsored by the Southwest Chapter of the American Medical Writers Association, in cooperation with the University of Texas School of Public Health at Houston. Dinner will be available one hour prior to the lecture; reservations must be mailed by March 14, 2002. The cost for dinner is \$12.00 for AMWA members and \$14.00 for non-members. Once again a spectacular "fajita feast" catered by Pico's will include beef, chicken, and grilled vegetable fajitas, with black beans, tortillas, guacamole, pico de gallo, and queso. Soft drinks are included. To register, use the registration form on page 4 of this newsletter (make checks payable to AMWA Southwest).

What: Lecture and Dinner

When: Wednesday, March 20; 5:30-7:30 p.m.

Where: University of Texas School of Public Health
(see directions below)

Dinner: Members \$12; Non-members \$14

RSVP using the registration form on page 4 or in upcoming e-mail reminders. **Please respond by March 14.**

For more information, contact Kate O Suilleabhain or Tom Gegeny (see contact information under "Chapter Officers" on this page).

Directions: The UT School of Public Health is located at 1200 Herman Pressler. To reach it from Fannin St., turn east on Holcombe Blvd. and proceed to Bertner. Park in Garage #2, which is on the north side of Holcombe at Bertner (hourly rates apply). Cross Holcombe and proceed south on Bertner past the site of the old UT Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences (now a construction site for a school of nursing). The UT School of Public Health will be the tall building on your left at the corner of Herman Pressler and Bertner. The dinner and lecture will be off the main lobby on the ground floor in rooms 102-A and 102-B.


AMERICAN
MEDICAL WRITERS
ASSOCIATION

McGovern Award Winner Delivers Eye-Opening Presentation at this Year's Banquet

AMWA Southwest Chapter members and health-care professionals from throughout the Houston area attended the McGovern Award Banquet, held at the Houston Plaza Hilton on Wednesday, January 23, 2002. This banquet was held in honor of Paula L. Knudson, Executive Coordinator of the Office of Research Support Communities for The University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston, who received this year's award in recognition of her 24 years of dedication to the field of biomedical ethics. After dinner, Ms. Knudson gave a lecture titled "The Minefields Surrounding Informed Consent for Research."

Ms. Knudson outlined the complexities of drafting informed-consent forms and stated that these documents often "oversell the benefits" of therapy for patients while failing to fully elucidate the risks. Ms. Knudson pointed out that patients who elect to participate in clinical trials are sometimes unaware that they may wind up in a control group and receive no treatment. Moreover, the descriptions of intended therapy are often lost amidst technical jargon the patient does not understand. Ms. Knudson recommended that informed-consent forms be written at the sixth-grade reading level and that they be designed for maximum legibility and comprehension by patients. The forms should specify any alternative procedures; matters of confidentiality; events that could prompt elimination of patients from the trial; and details of reimbursement for expenses, compensation for potential injury, and potential profit sharing (in the event that the patient's participation in the trial yields a marketable product).

Ms. Knudson also pointed out that certain health-care settings in which patients or their family members are likely to be under undue stress—such as an emergency room, a delivery room, a neonatal intensive care unit, or any other intensive care unit—are inappropriate for giving or obtaining

informed consent. However, the window of time in which informed consent can be given is sometimes very brief, such that investigators seek informed consent under unduly stressful circumstances.

In addition, Ms. Knudson stressed that whatever the setting, it may be impossible to obtain truly informed consent from certain individuals, such as children, people who are



From left to right, Southwest Chapter President, Lorraine Cherry; McGovern Award Recipient, Paula L. Knudson; and McGovern Award Chair, Jennifer Newcomb Fernandez

mentally ill, elderly people with cognitive impairment, and prisoners. For the past 7 years, her institution has refined a system to exclude from clinical trials people who cannot give informed consent because they cannot fully comprehend all aspects of their participation in the trial. However, Ms. Knudson also pointed out that the vulnerability one incurs by virtue of being under the care of a physician raises an important, perhaps unanswerable, question for those who strive to traverse the mine-filled landscape of informed consent: Can any patient truly grant informed consent? Ms. Knudson concluded her talk by stating that the goals of research may conflict with the goals of patient care, particularly when investigators have a financial stake in the outcome of the trial. Such conflicts of interest raise yet another question: In attempting to obtain informed consent from patients, are we engaged in an essentially meaningless enterprise?

After the lecture, Ms. Knudson answered questions from the audience. The lecture was preceded by a cocktail hour, dinner, and dessert.



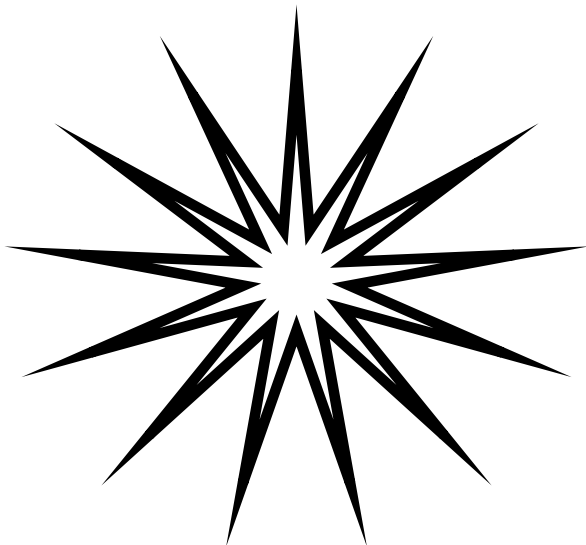
McGovern Award Chair, Jennifer Newcomb Fernandez, introducing the night's speaker

News from New Mexico: Fall Brown-Bag Lunch Meeting

In a brown-bag lunch meeting held at the American Society of Radiologic Technologists facility in October, members of the New Mexico AMWA region enjoyed the opportunity to view a video of the March 2001 presentation by Medscape's Bill Silberg: "The Challenges of Biomedical Publishing on the Internet." We extend thanks to Thomas Gegeny for arranging to record this informative and entertaining lecture for those unable to attend the event. Although much of the Southwest AMWA activity occurs in Houston, we appreciate the ongoing efforts made to include us and other outlying branches in regional matters.

Silberg's presentation gave our group a number of useful talking points. We discussed the importance of maintaining the foundation of a text-based publication while expanding its web-based counterpart. We agreed with Silberg's thoughts on the importance of understanding audience needs and concerns as we design or maintain medical format websites. We were also very interested in Silberg's ideas regarding the "killer app," or specific application that motivates people to frequent a website.

Earlier in our meeting, Janet Yagoda Shagam, the New Mexico regional director, brought up some interesting possibilities for our group that would increase public awareness of AMWA and biomedical writing careers. She explained that the local chapter of the Society for Technical Communications (www.stc.org) has expressed an interest in developing networking opportunities with AMWA members through cooperative meetings. Shagam also suggested the idea of creating a more public version of our branch meetings, such as pairing up with appropriate book signings or public interest lectures.



Mark Your Calendar!

Annual Career Roundtable Discussions
May 15, 2002

The May meeting will again feature career roundtable discussions in the private dining room and beautiful gardens at Baba Yega restaurant in Houston, Texas. A chapter member with particular expertise will lead each discussion. Last year's discussion topics included: "Medical writing as part of a research institute team," "How to plan and run an effective meeting," "Developing patient education materials," and "Writing for the Web." The chapter will also conduct its annual business meeting and election of new officers, and will honor the recipient of its second annual student essay award for excellence in biomedical communications.

Not in the Houston area? No problem!

Southwest Chapter lectures are being videotaped so that members in more remote regions can view them. Gather colleagues and friends for a regional meeting to view taped lectures, discuss topics in biomedical writing and editing, network with other professionals, and more! There are even some chapter funds available to help with the cost of such meetings!

For more information, contact your regional director or Chapter President Lorraine Cherry (see listings at www.amwasouthwest.org/officers.htm).

3 Ways to Get the Most Out of Chapter Membership!

1. Join the chapter e-mail list. Do you get meeting announcements and other important information by e-mail? No? Then join the list! Contact Noelle Heinze. nheinze@mdanderson.org
2. Subscribe to the *amwasouthwest* discussion group. Find out what members are saying about medical writing and editing! On the Web at: groups.yahoo.com/group/amwasouthwest
3. Visit the chapter website!
www.amwasouthwest.org

AMWA Southwest Chapter News

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Registration Form

The Popular Media as Public Health Catalyst

The University of Texas–Houston School of Public Health

March 20, 2002

5:30–7:30 p.m.

Name: _____

Daytime Phone: _____

Guest Name(s): _____

_____ member(s) X \$12 = \$ _____

_____ guest(s) X \$14 = \$ _____

Please RSVP by March 14. Send check payable to AMWA Southwest and reservation form to:

Kate O Suilleabhain
506 West Cottage, Apt. 2
Houston, TX 77009

AMWA Southwest Chapter Scholarship for Biomedical Communication

The Southwest Chapter of the American Medical Writer's Association (AMWA) is proud to offer a student scholarship in biomedical communication for 2002. Applicants must be currently enrolled college or graduate students in Texas, Louisiana, Arkansas, Oklahoma, or New Mexico. Entries will be judged on the basis of a 500- to 750-word essay on any aspect of scientific research or biomedical communication. The winner will receive a \$500 cash award, a certificate of recognition, and a complimentary 1-year membership in AMWA. The deadline for entries is April 1, 2002.

For more information and application forms, write to
Grace Darling ELS(D)
411 North Washington #6900
Dallas TX 75246

or visit the Southwest Chapter website:

<http://www.amwasouthwest.org/scholarship/2002/scholarship02.htm>.