



### Voices of Experience

By Heather Haley, MS

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#### ⇒ Interviewee: Karen Cristello

Promotions Coordinator, American Academy of Ophthalmology, Division of Meetings & Exhibits

#### What is your education and work background? How long have you worked in medical writing?

I have a BA, with a major in English literature and a minor in professional writing from Portland State University. I taught English in Kyoto and Tokyo for 4 years, did public relations for a fashion company in Portland for 4 years, and sold educational products in New York for 3 years. I've been in this job for 4 years; it is my first foray into the medical world, and I love it. Promoting medical education is far more soul-satisfying than peddling footwear.

#### What is your current medical writing position and how did you find it?

I promote the Academy's annual meeting to about 45,000 potential attendees through our Web site and *EyeNet Magazine*, and manage production of the Annual Meeting *Advance Program*, which is considered one of our major marketing pieces; the *Pocket Guide*; and the *Final Program*. I also promote the printed programs and meetings to our exhibitors to sell ad space in the books. The programs are by far the most technical, fun, and interesting part of my job. My perfectionist side relishes the challenge of creating 100% accurate publications, while my curious side thrives on learning about eye diseases.

I found the posting on Craigslist after I moved to San Francisco. I was looking for something that would draw on my geeky passion for grammar and past experience in promotions and writing but that would also allow me to be somewhat creative and have some variety in my various tasks. Ever since dissecting a nutria and blowing up its lungs with a straw in the third grade, I've been enamored with anatomy and biology, so being at a medical association was icing on the cake!

#### How is working for a professional society different from working in a large corporation or agency? What pressures and issues are affecting medical societies today?

Our "clients" are not just doctors or potential sales; they are our members. They pay us and have certain service expectations, so everything we do has to be in their best interest. We need awareness of how our actions affect our accreditation. In my department, these actions include



collecting financial interest disclosures, keeping advertising away from educational content, and maintaining a clear separation from non-Academy symposia.

One of the biggest current issues is the problem of commercial bias creeping into educational forums. For example, we are a nonprofit, so of course we want advertising and sponsorship dollars. But it's a delicate balance. It would be really easy to go overboard and accept any kind of advertising and marketing our exhibitors want. On the other hand, some people would like to see no promotion at all. This year, we cut our sponsorships of pens, limited logo usage on bags, and restricted giveaways at exhibitor booths, and it's just going to get tighter and tighter.

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#### Is there anything you wish you'd known starting out that you know now?

There haven't been any unhappy surprises. I look forward to not knowing everything because I enjoy learning and growing and acquiring new skills. If I knew everything, there would be no challenge and I would quickly get bored. Perhaps if I knew about medical writing 20 years ago, my career path might have been different but not necessarily better. I really appreciate the variety of projects, industries, people, and places I've experienced; they've made me a more well rounded person.

#### How does your current job differ from your first job?

My jobs have all been so different while sharing common threads. Now I'm promoting a medical meeting and education to ophthalmologists while working with ad agencies, pharmaceutical and device companies, and internal staff. Contrast that to pitching fashion magazines and promoting footwear to consumers at rock concerts, or teaching grammar and conversation skills to Japanese housewives and business people—the closest I came to medical writing then was teaching a dialogue on visiting the doctor.

**Since many of our readers work at ad agencies and pharmaceutical and device companies, what tips do you have for working successfully with someone in your role?**

Be organized. People seem to move around between companies and especially between products, and gaps in communication occur within their own teams and between the various companies/agencies. I know everyone is juggling many things, but I am constantly surprised that people do not read confirmations or policies and forget deadlines (or sometimes, that they've placed an ad at all!). Be thorough in all communications, send deadline reminders, and even make sure the ads are accurate (with regard to the association-related copy). Although we're not responsible for their mistakes, I do not want any erroneous content in my books.

**What are the best ways for a newcomer to establish himself or herself as a medical writer?**

My job is a great starting point. If you're interested in a job

that allows you some creativity, you could definitely move into a health care advertising or public relations agency. There are tons of possibilities; it just depends on how technical you want your job to be. I'm not in a position to hire, but if I were, I would look for someone with a balance of technical skill, attention to detail, and creativity. I would also look for the ability to adapt one's writing style to different audiences and various mediums, such as the Web, newsletters, magazines, ads, and abstracts.

**What resources do you recommend for a writer in his or her first position?**

Definitely attend AMWA conferences. I always enjoy the homework and look forward to the workshops and open sessions. I've taken courses from both the editing/writing and public relations/advertising tracks and the instructors have all been extremely knowledgeable. Also, invest in the *AMA Manual of Style* and any publications that are pertinent to your specific medical area.

## Get the Recognition You or Your Publication Deserves

"Award-winning" on your résumé or an award logo on your Web site can distinguish you from your colleagues. So take the first step toward enhancing your professional reputation and credibility by reviewing your work from the last year, selecting your best material, and submitting it to one or more of the following competitions.

**AMWA 2010 ERIC W. MARTIN AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE IN MEDICAL WRITING**

AMWA encourages members to submit entries to the Eric W. Martin Award competition, which recognizes writing in 2 categories: Articles (print and electronic) Intended for a Public or Health Care Consumer Audience, and Articles (print and electronic) Intended for a Professional (Medical) Audience. Monographs and articles must have been published in the 2009 calendar year.

› *The deadline for entries is February 2, 2010. Criteria for the award and entry forms are available on the AMWA Web site ([www.amwa.org](http://www.amwa.org)).*

**AMWA 2010 MEDICAL BOOK AWARDS**

AMWA also invites entries for its 2010 Medical Book Awards competition, which recognizes authors of nonfiction medical writing. Awards are presented to the author(s) of the best English-language medical books in each of 3 categories: Books for Health Care Professionals—Physicians, Books for Health Care Professionals—Nonphysicians, and Books for Public or Health Care Consumers. Only first editions (or significantly revised subsequent editions) released in 2009 are eligible.

› *The deadline for entries is February 26, 2010. Criteria for the awards and entry forms are available on the AMWA Web site ([www.amwa.org](http://www.amwa.org)).*

**EXCEL AWARDS**

The Society of National Association Publishers (SNAP) invites submissions to its 2009 EXCEL Awards, an annual competition recognizing and rewarding the exemplary work of association publishers. The EXCEL program judges more than 1,200 magazines, newsletters, scholarly journals, electronic publications and Web sites in the areas of editorial quality, design, general excellence, most improved and more.

› *The deadline for entries is in mid to late February 2010. Visit [www.snaponline.org](http://www.snaponline.org) for more information.*

**APEX AWARDS**

Submissions are also now being accepted for the Annual Apex Awards for Publication Excellence, which recognize excellence in editorial content, graphic design, and overall communications effectiveness. Communicators can choose from 110 different categories under several headings, including newsletters; magazines and journals; annual reports; brochures, manuals, and reports; electronic and video publications; and Web and Internet sites. The Apex Awards are sponsored by the editors of *Writing that Works*, a newsletter for writing, editing, and communications professionals. The contest is open to writers, editors, publications staff, and business and nonprofit communicators.

› *The deadline for entries is March 17, 2010. Visit [www.apexawards.com](http://www.apexawards.com) for more information.*

↻ See the Member Musings section (*beginning on page 207*) to learn about members and publications who have earned recognition through these writing/publications competitions. Reviews of books honored with 2009 AMWA Medical Book Awards are included in the Media Reviews section, which begins on page 192.



## THE WEB PRESENTS

Read summaries  
of meetings  
of other  
professional  
organizations.

### **The International Publication Planning Association (TIPPA), [www.publicationplanningassociation.org](http://www.publicationplanningassociation.org)**

In-depth summary of the 7th Annual Meeting (June 2009), by Elizabeth Wager. Available as a PDF download.

### **EQUATOR Network**

**[www.equator-network.org](http://www.equator-network.org)**

Slide sets from select presentations at the 6th International Congress on Peer Review and Biomedical Publication (September 2009). All slides available at **<http://tiny.cc/Favaj>**.

- › EQUATOR Workshop: Key Guidelines for Reporting Health Research Studies  
Workshop led by Doug Altman, David Moher, Ken Schulz, and John Hoey (members of the EQUATOR Steering group), with guest speaker Christine Laine, Editor of *Annals of Internal Medicine*
- › EQUATOR 2nd Annual Lecture: Redefining Medicine: Reporting or Reclaiming Research for Health?  
Richard Horton, Editor-in-Chief, *The Lancet*
- › Peer Review Congress Presentations: "Spin" in Reports of Randomized Controlled Trials with Nonstatistically Significant Primary Outcomes  
Isabelle Boutron, Susan Dutton, Philippe Ravaud, Douglas G. Altman
- › Reporting Guidelines for Clinical Research: A Systematic Review  
David Moher

### **European Medical Writers Association (EMWA)**

**[www.emwa.org](http://www.emwa.org)**

Writing Protocols: Collaboration and Compromise or Conflict and Confusion? ICR-EMWA Joint Symposium (by Alex Dedman and Andrew Smith)

Published in *The Write Stuff* (official journal of EMWA) [2009;18(2):127-129]

Available at **[www.emwa.org/JournalArticles/JA\\_V18\\_I2\\_Dedman1.pdf](http://www.emwa.org/JournalArticles/JA_V18_I2_Dedman1.pdf)**

## Credentialing Examinations: BELS and CMPP

### **Board of Editors in the Life Sciences (BELS) Certification Examinations**

Friday, March 12, 2010, 12:30–3:30 PM

Orlando, FL

(AMWA Florida Chapter Conference, March 12-13, 2010)

→ Register by: February 19, 2010

Sunday, April 18, 2010, 2:00–5:00 PM

Pacific Grove, CA

(AMWA Pacific Coast Regional Chapter Conference, April 18-21, 2010)

→ Register by: March 28, 2010

Saturday, May 14, 2010, 1:00–4:00 PM

Atlanta, GA

(Council of Science Editors Meeting, May 14-18, 2010)

→ Register by: April 17, 2010

Wednesday, November 10, 2010, 9:30 AM–12:30 PM

Milwaukee, WI

(AMWA Annual Conference, November 11-13, 2010)

→ Register by: October 20, 2010

Note: You must successfully complete the application process before you can register for an examination. Please allow at least 5 weeks for the application and registration process if you use the US mail. International mail may take longer than 5 weeks. Obtain an application form from the BELS Web site ([www.bels.org](http://www.bels.org)).

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### **Certified Medical Publication Professional (CMPP) credential**

(offered through the International Society for Medical Publication Professionals [ISMPP]). Qualified candidates can take the 3-hour exam during the month of March 2010 at an approved CASTLE Worldwide testing center location throughout the United States and Europe. (Locations are listed at [www.castleworldwide.com/mainsite/ibtsites](http://www.castleworldwide.com/mainsite/ibtsites).) For more information, visit [www.ismpp.org](http://www.ismpp.org).