

AMWA MID-AMERICA

Summer 2015



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A Note from the Editor

Magdalena Berry, MA

Dear Chapter Members,

Greetings!

I just registered for this year's Annual Conference and hope to see some of you there. It's a great opportunity to keep up with new developments in our field, to network, to gather with old friends, and to make new ones. There's also, of course, our chapter dinner, which is always great fun (and delicious, too)!

This summer issue of the Mid-America Chapter newsletter includes reports on the luncheon in St. Louis and the AMWA Board of Directors meeting, which April Coburn generously volunteered to attend. Our thanks to April for her comprehensive report, excerpted here. I've also included a few book recommendations for those with time for summer reading.

The deadline for the next newsletter is **September 25, 2015**. Newsletters are generally issued quarterly, at the end of March, June, September, and December.

As always, feel free to send any suggestions or contributions!

Save The Date for **AMWA's 75th Annual Conference**,
September 30 - October 3, 2015, in San Antonio, TX
Grand Hyatt San Antonio
600 E Market Street, San Antonio, TX 78205

Chapter Officers

President: Rona Clair Grunspan, MD

Treasurer: Joanne M. McAndrews, PhD

Secretary: Linda Landon, PhD

Membership chair: Nicholas Russell

Newsletter chair: Magdalena Berry, MA

Webmaster: Lisa M. Balbes, PhD

St. Louis Freelance Luncheon Coordinators:

Lisa M. Balbes, PhD, Joanne M. McAndrews,
PhD

Chapter Business

Magdalena Berry, MA

Chapter officers hold regular meetings, usually via conference call, to report on and plan events and to discuss any issues or needs. The next meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, July 7, 2015.

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St. Louis-area Freelance Luncheon Series: TechWrite STL

Joanne McAndrews, PhD

Lisa Balbes, PhD



The TechWrite STL group continues to hold its bi-monthly lunch meetings. At most meetings, a topic of interest to freelance medical

and technical writers is presented by a member and discussed by the group, usually over lunch at a local restaurant.

A behind the scenes tour of the Missouri Botanical Garden Research Center's herbarium and library was held on May 14, 2015. The tour was hosted by James C. Solomon, Ph.D., Associate Curator and Curator of the Herbarium, and Doug Holland, Director of the Peter H. Raven Library. The Garden's herbarium is the 2nd largest in the United States and the 5th largest in the world, consisting of dried plant matter specimens collected from around the world. The herbarium contains 6.5 million specimens and the library 200,000 volumes and 800 periodicals. Both collections are focused on taxonomy, diversity, and conservation of plants. Dr. Solomon described the herbarium collection and documentation process, and led the group into the climate-controlled area where the specimens are kept. Mr. Holland showed the group the Rare Book Room and gave a quick tour of the library's climate-controlled

stacks. The oldest book in the library dates back to 1474-- a how-to book about farming in Northern Italy. Tour attendees also observed the library's book conservator at work. Following the tour, members enjoyed lunch at the Garden café.

Planned **future events** for 2015 include

- "The Wonders of LinkedIn for Business and Career" in **July**,
- a dinner with attorney Jim Hacking (who will moderate "Ridiculous employment contract terms and what to do about them") in **September**, and
- "Don't Get Technical with Me: The Truth about Technical Writing" in **November**.

Lisa Balbes and Joanne McAndrews have been co-organizing the group since its founding in 2006. A schedule of upcoming luncheons can be found on our chapter website (<http://www.amwa-midamerica.org/index.html>). A list of past topics is available on the History tab on that website, as are handouts from selected luncheons.

AMWA Board of Directors Meeting

April Coburn

Here are **highlights** from the recent meeting, reported on by April Coburn and summarized here.

The meeting was held on April 17-18, 2015, in Bethesda, MD. The President presented two proposed policies for board members: conflict of interest and confidentiality, and also an updated AMWA nondiscrimination policy. All were voted on and approved.

Treasurer's report for July 1, 2014 – December 31, 2014. At the end of the second quarter, there was an excess of \$11,299. Last year's excess was \$373, 184. The variances in the budget were due to flat/declining membership, which resulted in the member dues being under budget; lower than expected workshop attendance; and higher than average advertising revenue. Additionally, the meeting expenses were over budget due to a \$50K penalty paid to change the dates and contract of the 2017 conference in Orlando. Business expenses were slightly over budget due to credit card fees from the online system use to pay dues.

A proposal to streamline the **investment policy**, moving from four investment accounts to two, with objective being to provide AMWA with clear tools to evaluate the return performance of invested funds over the long term. and generate a real rate of return (ie, return over inflation) net of fees of 3% or greater was approved.

Membership. In part due to a steady decline in membership, a Director of Marketing, Communications, and Member Engagement was recently created in order to help with AMWA's "commitment to expanding communications and outreach efforts." Additionally, the Association Management System will be receiving upgrades to help improve functionality. In regards to membership, there has been a drop of 2% in membership since last December and a steady

decline overall in membership since 2009. AMWA hosted a strategic planning initiative as part of this BOD meeting to see what changes might be made to help improve membership engagement and increase membership overall. Besides declining membership, sales of the self-study modules are in decline as well. More research is being done to find modules that will engage AMWA members who are in need of soft skills or skills for work after initial development (such as project management, functional management, and negotiation).

Other discussion items for the BOD meeting were the chapter financial reporting, AMWA compliance, and IRS filing; enhanced marketing and communications; new member benefits including an e-newsletter; and the presentation of the nominating committee's slate of officers for 2015-2016: Kathryn Spiegel, Secretary; Lori Alexander, President-Elect; and Christine Wogan, Treasurer. The motion to approve the slate as presented was passed.

Awards. The AMWA Fellowship Committee nominated three AMWA members for Active Fellowships: Catherine Magill, Northern California Chapter; Kathryn Spiegel, Michigan Chapter; and Kristina Wasson-Blader, Empire State – Metro New York Chapter. The motion to approve these nominees was voted upon and passed. Helen Hodgson, PhD., was voted on and approved for the Harold Swanberg distinguished Service Award.

The **strategic planning initiative**, which took place outside of the normal BOD meeting, was to assess the strengths, opportunities, and aspirations of AMWA. Several areas were identified that were important to the BOD members: increased membership, maintaining quality, and expansion of AMWA's reach worldwide. The Executive Committee will now begin to focus on interviews with others involved

AMWA Board of Directors Meeting

in AMWA to assess their ideas and assessments regarding the following:

- Strengths – What do we do well that we can we build on?
- Opportunities – What are our stakeholders asking for?
- Aspirations – What do we care most deeply about?
- Results – How do we know we are succeeding?

Overall, the BOD meeting was interesting, engaging, and an opportunity to connect with other members to see how AMWA can evolve into a compelling force in the medical communications arena.

Book Notes

Magdalena Berry

If you're interested in electronic health records (EHRs), I recommend **The Digital Doctor**, by Robert Wachter. EHR systems are transforming the way medicine is practiced, and this transformation hasn't been smooth. Wachter, who teaches at UCSF and founded the hospitalist movement, is an engaging writer. In this well-researched book, he uses case studies and interviews with a wide variety of players, from practitioners to policy experts, to illuminate the pitfalls and promises of moving medicine into the digital age.

In an entirely different vein, have you heard of graphic medicine? One of my students wrote about the use of graphic novels in patient education - think about graphic novels exploring a particular experience of illness. Recently, the *New York Times* reviewed two books about this new way of communicating within healthcare. Ian Williams' graphic novel, **The Bad Doctor** is a fictionalized memoir of a doctor's experiences in a rural community in Wales, and one of the first of

the genre written from a physician's viewpoint. **The Graphic Medicine Manifesto** is a collection of essays in which the theory and practice of the field, which is making inroads into medical schools, are discussed, using both text and graphics. The value of storytelling, or narrative, for practitioners and patients is well known; now attention is being given to exploring the use of comic panels and drawings for those who may find words alone inadequate.

The *Times* reviewer also mentioned one of the best books I've read in the past couple of years; one which turned out to be enormously helpful, as well as entertaining. If you have elderly parents (and even if you don't) try Roz Chast's **Can't We Talk About Something More Pleasant?** Chast, a cartoonist who contributes regularly to *The New Yorker*, chronicles her parents' last years with tremendous humor and sensitivity. I laughed, I cried...