



# **AMWA Mid-America Newsletter**

**American Medical Writers Association  
Winter 2012**

# Mid-America Chapter News

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St. Louis Freelance Luncheon  
Coordinators: Lisa M. Balbes, PhD &  
Joanne M. McAndrews, PhD

## Chapter newsletter/Web site

Our chapter publishes a newsletter several times a year that is posted to our web site as well as e-mailed to each member. The web site also features announcements about current and future chapter activities, including the St. Louis area AMWA/STC freelance luncheon series, get-together dinners at the AMWA annual conferences, and information about our annual chapter conferences. Here's the url: <http://www.amwa-midamerica.org>



## Editor's Corner by Magdalena Berry, MA

Greetings at mid-winter!

You'll notice a new section in this quarter's newsletter: **Book Reviews**. Lyn Gattis, PhD, an associate professor on the Professional Writing faculty at Missouri State reviews the new edition of Helen Osborne's popular handbook on health literacy.

[By the way, I was fortunate to speak to Osborne at the recent AMWA conference and for those of us who are involved in patient education and health literacy

issues, she suggested an avenue of inquiry: What is the value added when health literacy concerns are incorporated into health communications? There is little available research quantifying the results of adequate patient education in terms of reduced costs and improved outcomes.]

We encourage any of you that come across a book that might be of interest to chapter members to send in a brief description - no deadlines, no required

word counts! Everyone's welcome to contribute.

What else would you like to see in our newsletter? If you've got ideas, let me know, [magberry@me.com](mailto:magberry@me.com). Thanks!



## St. Louis Area Freelance Luncheon by Joanne McAndrews, PhD and Lisa Balbes, PhD

St. Louis-area freelance Mid-America chapter members have been holding bi-monthly luncheons with St. Louis-area Society for Technical Communication (STC) Consultants and Independent Contractors (CIC) since September 2006. A different topic of interest to freelance medical/technical writers is presented by a member and then discussed at each meeting, usually over lunch at a local restaurant.

Our November 2011 luncheon, "Writing Sharper Than a Laser", was led by Rob Saigh. Rob presented many examples of "bad" writing, discussed common mistakes that writers make, and provided resources/suggestions for improving one's writing.

Upcoming luncheon topics include a discussion about "Protecting Your Intellectual Property" to be led by Betsy Frick; "Dictation Software" to be

presented by Alice Fugate; and a lecture/tour at the Donald Danforth Plant Science Center.

Lisa Balbes and Joanne McAndrews are the co-organizers of this group. Please contact them at [lisa@balbes.com](mailto:lisa@balbes.com) and [jmmcandrews@earthlink.net](mailto:jmmcandrews@earthlink.net) to be added to the mailing list for this group—new members are welcome, as are suggestions for future luncheon topics and volunteer presenters. Past and upcoming dates and topics can be found online at:

<http://www.stc-stlouis.org/cicsig.html>



## Job Opportunities

Actively looking for experienced medical writers to join global company, can be home based for the right candidate. For more

information please contact Ash Patel on [347-284-6098](tel:347-284-6098) or email [apatel@barringtonjames.com](mailto:apatel@barringtonjames.com)



## Book Reviews

### **Health Literacy from A to Z: Practical Ways to Communicate Your Health Message (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.)**

Helen Osborne. 2013. Burlington, Mass.: Jones & Bartlett Learning. [ISBN 978-1-4496-0053-2. 256 pages, including index.]

The second edition of *Health Literacy from A to Z* delivers just what it promises: A user-friendly, well-organized, quick reference to important topics in health communication.

In this update Osborne has developed 42 chapters on single topics ranging from About Health Literacy, which offers definitions and rationale for health communication, to Zest and Pizzazz, a discussion of the passion health communicators bring to their work.

Each chapter is concise, usually four to eight pages long. For each topic, Osborne provides Starting Points, or reasons for considering the topic, followed by Strategies and Suggestions for putting the chapter's ideas into practice. A Citations

section documents the references in that chapter, and the Sources section suggests additional reading.

As in the previous edition, *A to Z* focuses on key questions. How is health literacy related to the reader's physical environment? Some interesting answers are here. How can we best handle regulatory and legal language in documents for general readers? The book suggests ways to organize and provide context. What about using readability formulas? The chapter examines pros and cons.

The second edition of *A to Z* includes new information on knowing your audience, a checklist for putting health literacy strategies into practice, and topics such as the business side of health communication; approaches to patients who are under stress; and patients, health messages, and the media. I was especially interested in the new discussions of technology such as blogs, interactive media, podcasts, emails, and texting.

In addition, each chapter now contains interesting “stories,” or practical solutions in the form of anecdotes, quotations, and advice from other experts in the field.

*Health Literacy from A to Z* does not offer comprehensive discussions of medical communication, but it’s not meant for that purpose. If you’re an experienced health

communicator or instructor, *A to Z* is an excellent review of practical topics not included in more theoretical texts. If you’re just starting out in health communication, you’ll find *A to Z* a good overview and a source for ideas you can research in greater depth.

*Reviewed by Lyn Gattis, PhD*