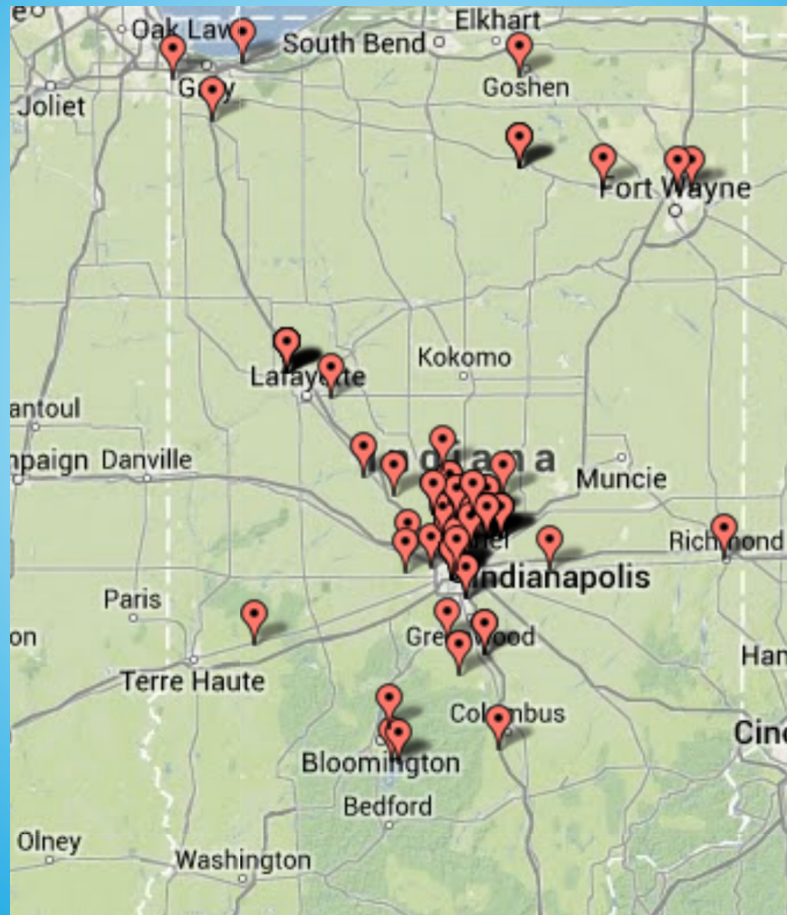


AMWA

Indiana Chapter Newsletter

January 2018



American Medical Writers Association Indiana Chapter

Executive Committee 2017-2019

Newsletter

Officers

President	David Caldwell, PhD
President-Elect	Terry Farley
Secretary	Angela Beeler, CRA
Treasurer	Nicoletta Bivi, PhD
Immediate Past President	Esther Brooks-Asplund, PhD

Editor

Rachel Foster, MPH

Committee Chairs

Education	David Caldwell, PhD
Member Resources	Esther Brooks-Asplund, PhD
Program	Barbara Lightfoot, BS, CCRP
Publications	Rachel Foster, MPH
Social Media & Marketing	Terry Farley

Coming Attractions

April 20-21, 2018

AMWA Indiana Chapter Conference

Eli Lilly Technology North

Indianapolis, IN 46285

Links

[AMWA](#)

[AMWA LinkedIn](#) [AMWA Twitter](#) [AMWA Facebook](#)

[AMWA Indiana Chapter](#) [Indiana Chapter LinkedIn](#)

Please let us hear your voice!

Let us know if there is anything we can do to help you benefit professionally from your AMWA membership. Volunteering to help our chapter or national association is a great way to have fun while meeting some wonderful people, improving yourself and the profession, and becoming and being the leader you were meant to be. Join our LinkedIn group, come to the chapter events, or click on the name of a chapter officer or committee chair above to join the conversation about medical communication and our chapter.

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Find updates to chapter and community events on our [Web site](#)

Cover

Find AMWA members near you by searching the AMWA member directory by city.

This map of the locations of our 80 chapter members was created with [BatchGeo](#).

From the President, AMWA Indiana Chapter

Dear Chapter Members,

Welcome to a new year with AMWA!

I sincerely thank Esther Brooks-Asplund for leading our chapter as president and as member resources chair last year and in other roles in previous years. She helped to navigate the complex route to AMWA's new governance system and to plan last year's excellent chapter conference, produced our chapter's first educational webinar, led our pilot mentoring program, served as a medical writing mentor, and introduced our chapter to new members. This year, Esther will again serve as member resources chair and will serve at the national level as a member of AMWA's nominating committee.

This year my objective is to adapt what our chapter offers to what our members want, as best we can. Nicola Parry, Eimile Oakes, and I have been asking each of you how our chapter can help you professionally. The survey will end in early January, 2018, so please be sure to tell us what you want by then. We need your help to figure out what we want our chapter to be and how to build enthusiasm for excellence in medical communication.

Our Chapter

We are AMWA's smallest (85 members) but most spirited chapter. This year one third of our members attended our annual chapter conference (at least twice the attendance rate of other chapters at their conferences). One fifth of our members volunteer to help our chapter regularly and even more help by writing articles for our newsletter, by speaking at our chapter events, and by offering valuable advice. Angela Beeler, chapter secretary, documents our chapter committee meetings with well-written minutes. Nicoletta Bivi, chapter treasurer, manages our finances and files our legal documents and tax forms with the government and with national AMWA.

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chapter

We will revise our chapter bylaws in 2018 to reflect the new relation between national AMWA and its chapters. That relation recently changed from informal to formal. As required, in 2016 our chapter became an independent nonprofit, tax-exempt entity affiliated with national AMWA. The AMWA Chapter License and Affiliation Agreement implemented in 2017 legally formalizes AMWA's expectations and requirements of all chapters. Revision of AMWA's bylaws in 2017 restructured its Board of Directors. In the past, each of 19 chapters appointed one or two of its members to the Board. Those several Board members have been replaced by one Board member appointed by AMWA's president-elect to represent all chapters. That one Board member chairs AMWA's new Chapter Advisory Council, which relays chapter interests to the Board. Barbara Lightfoot will represent us on the Council in 2018.

AMWA, at both
the national
and local
levels, exists
only because
of its
volunteers

Membership & Volunteers

Esther Brooks-Asplund, our member resources chair, welcomes our new members and asks exiting members how we can improve our chapter. She also distributes the chapter publications and job ads. Please tell Esther what our chapter can do for you and let her know about any organization or individual that might benefit from AMWA membership.

Terry Farley, our president-elect and marketing chair, helps chapter members hold discussions through our chapter's LinkedIn AMWA subgroup and markets our chapter both internally and externally. Please let him know how he can use LinkedIn and other media to benefit our chapter. Please help him identify influential people in other organizations that might benefit from association with our chapter.

AMWA, at both the national and local levels, exists only because of its volunteers. Almost all of AMWA's benefits are produced by volunteers. We give, but also get. Working with colleagues to build our profession helps people in early or middle stages of their career develop professional relationships, learn about their profession, develop leadership and technical skills, and

gain visibility. People in late stages of their career benefit from the satisfaction of setting goals and standards for the profession, of preparing the next generation to continue something that matters, and of leaving the profession they love better than they found it.

It's easy to volunteer at the chapter level. Just tell me or any other chapter leader (see the list on our chapter website) what you want to do. Don't worry about whether you know enough to participate—you do!

Become a committee member if you would like to devote at least 3 hours per month to our chapter. In brief, the education committee plans our annual chapter conference; the program committee plans webinars and chapter dinners; the member resources committee acts as the chapter's human resources department; the publications committee publishes our Newsletter, Newsflash, and podcasts; and the marketing committee develops professional relationships among our chapter members and Indiana's biomedical community.

If you are too busy for a committee role but can spare a few hours this year, choose from a list of specific tasks available from Esther Brooks-Asplund.

Volunteering at the national level is easy, too. Just fill out AMWA's volunteer interest form and someone from the national organization will contact you.

Events

Barbara Lightfoot, our program chair, is planning chapter dinners and webinars (and maybe a picnic) for 2018. Please let her know when and where you want the dinners and what educational presentations and speakers you want at the dinners or webinars.

Local networking events are being planned by Esther Brooks-Asplund for the Bloomington area, by Nicola Parry for the Lafayette area, by Bill Pietrzak for northeast Indiana, by Daniela

Don't worry
about whether
you know
enough to
participate-you
do!

Ilijevski for northwest Indiana, and by Priya Dutta for our members in central Illinois. Please let me know if you would like to plan an event for the Evansville area.

Rachel Foster, our publications chair, reports these events as well as other information of interest to our members. Please let her know if you would like to see or submit an article or interview on some particular aspect of medical communication for our Newsletter. Rachel also publishes a monthly Newsflash that advertizes upcoming chapter events and summarizes medical communication news you might have missed. She publishes podcasts of dinner presentations on the chapter website for the benefit of those too distant or busy to attend.

I am chairing the education committee, which is planning a 2-day 2018 spring chapter conference in Indianapolis. As always, it will emphasize education and networking to help chapter members improve themselves and get to know one another. The best resource a medical communicator can have is another helpful medical communicator. We can't afford to offer AMWA workshops, but plan to offer some hands-on focused learning sessions. Please let me know if you would like to present an open session or lead a roundtable discussion on one of your areas of expertise.

National AMWA

This issue of our Newsletter describes the 2017 annual conference held at Disney World. Our chapter members attending enjoyed a networking dinner planned by Barbara Lightfoot and Randi Hooten. The 2018 conference will be held next November in Washington, DC.

Chapter member David Clemow chairs AMWA's Medical Writing Certification Commission. If you would like to take the certification exam, please read the Applicant and Candidate Handbook to see if you are eligible to take the exam. Why waste money on an application if you can't take the exam?

Your AMWA experience is what you make of it

Most of AMWA's certificate programs (n.b., these are different from the certification exam) are being discontinued. If you plan to complete a program, consider taking the required workshops soon. The Essential Skills certificate program remains active.

National AMWA offers a lot. For example, if you are looking for work, monitor AMWA's job board or consider enrolling in the freelance directory. Everyone knows about the excellent articles in the AMWA Journal, but have you seen the free mini-tutorials known as Pocket Trainings? Online discussions through Engage offer a wealth of helpful information.

Remember

Your AMWA experience is what you make of it. You can passively accept whatever drifts by. Or you can reach out and actively customize your experience to fit your unique situation. Our chapter is here to help you make your experience the best it can be. Our chapter provides you with a safe place to realize your talents and to improve your skills and the profession of medical communication.

I hope each of you has a wonderful year! If there is anything I can do to help you, please let me know.

Best regards,

David Caldwell
AMWA Indiana chapter president (2017-2018)
Email: president@hoosieramwa.org



Getting Noticed in a Crowded Online World

Emma Hitt Nichols, PhD

Back in 1999, when I first hung out my shingle as a freelance medical writer, the online world was just getting started. At the time, I remember debating whether or not I should sign up for an email address offered to me by my University. “What was the point of having one of those?” I thought to myself.



Fast forward nearly 20 years and the world looks a little different, at least when it comes to the online space. It's crowded. You have millions of people doing a “side hustle” in a desperate attempt to quit a day job they hate. So, if you are starting your freelance medical writing business today, it's not enough to put up a website and hope that prospective clients will find you. It's also not enough to send out a few random emails to people you don't know and hope that they will respond. It used to be a numbers game: send out enough emails, and someone will respond back. Not these days.

So what's a budding freelance medical writer to do? It's still possible to make an excellent income working from home as a medical writer BUT you have to be savvy about navigating the online space. In addition to working on writing skills and scientific knowledge, medical writers, at least the ones who want to freelance from home, should consider some of the following ideas:

1. Learn About Online Marketing and Entrepreneurship

Here is a list of gurus that I think are worth following (by no means an exhaustive list):

- o Amy Porterfield – www.amyporterfield.com: Great courses: Courses That Convert, Webinars That Convert, List Builder's Lab. Online Marketing Made Easy Podcast.
- o Pat Flynn – Powerup Podcasting
<https://www.smartpassiveincome.com/>

It's not enough
to send out a
few random
emails to
people you
don't know

What information can you provide to your clients that will be helpful to them?

- o Rick Mulready – Facebook advertising (you can target people who might hire a medical writer) <http://rickmulready.com/>
- o James Wedmore – Mind Your Business Podcast, all about the mindset of entrepreneurship
<https://itunes.apple.com/us/podcast/the-mind-your-business-podcast/id1074394632?mt=2>
- o Josh Turner – [Advanced LinkedIn Masterclass](#)

2. Create Something of Value to Attract Clients

I will use as an example the HittList, which is a weekly email we send out that contains medical writing jobs. I started sending this out in 2001 as a way of providing free job postings (because the economy was bad and I thought it was wrong that a certain medical writing organization was charging to post them). You can sign up [here](#) (it's still free). In any case, it costs a few hundred dollars each year to send it out but the goodwill, name recognition, and return it has generated over the years has offset the time and expense many, many fold. What information can you provide to your clients that will be helpful to them? Can you send it out in a weekly or even monthly newsletter? If you do regulatory writing or CME, perhaps you can create a newsletter about happenings in those fields, for example.

3. Look for Opportunities to Guest Post

It is challenging to gain traction with blog posts these days, but if you write one that is related to medical writing, you can send it to me at info@nascentmc.com and we will post it on the HittList and it will reach thousands of readers, while linking directly to your website (Interestingly not many people have sent in a guest blog post for the HittList, and I find this perplexing!). If you have a topic relevant to ACEHP, RAPS, AHJA, the Chicago Graham Medical writing program, etc., they would probably be willing to post a blog post if it were helpful to their readers. And in most cases you can put a short bio and a link at the end. This is a great way to get in front of people who could use your services.

4. Start a Podcast

There's a bit of a learning curve on this, but it's not too hard to learn how to do it. I recommend Pat Flynn's [Powerup Podcast](#) course. As an example, I have a new podcast called "[New FDA Approvals](#)". It takes me about one hour in the morning to create each episode, and I send it out 5 days a week. I get the latest news from a Google alert that comes in at about 5 a.m., and I simply report on that in a 10-minute episode. It's personally helpful because it keeps me up to date about what's going on in the pharma world. But also, I mention my medical writing business, Nascent Medical, at the end of the podcast. Most podcasts are once weekly and are prerecorded, so it doesn't have to be a daily newscast (I like to make things challenging for myself obviously!), but it's another way to attract clients to your business. Other ideas for podcasts are ones like [Grammar Girl](#) but that specializes in AMA style or one that discusses NIH or CDC happenings. Or one that talks about upcoming or past medical conferences, or one that takes a medical word and discusses its use and etiology in each episode, to name just a few examples. Podcasts now are what the online space itself used to be: an uncharted territory. Now is the time to get in there and start building a following.

Podcasts now are what the online space used to be: an uncharted territory.

5. Focus in on a Genre of Writing

Medical writing is pretty niche to start with, but if you take one genre within medical writing, for example, needs assessments, and become the absolute expert in that area, by posting information consistently on your website (ie, video, recording or written), then you will ultimately get visitors, work, and referrals from that. It will take time, at least a year or two (so make sure you are passionate about the topic!), but it will be worth it. Tip: read Medical Marketing & Media for ideas of problems/topics clients are dealing with.

6. Online Courses

You can become the world's leading expert in some niche of interest to potential clients, such as needs assessments, and then build an online course on a platform such as Teachable or Kajabi (which are really not hard to learn). Then 1) you quit only earning

dollars for hours worked, which gets to be a bit draining when you do medical writing for years and years, and 2) you can actually make quite a hefty income, far surpassing what you'd make as a medical writer--if you do it right. I recommend buying a book called "[Launch](#)" by Jeff Walker to understand how to sell online courses effectively (it's not enough just to post something online and hope that someone buys it—they won't). Interesting course topics could be on BELS certification training, medical terminology, or medical editing. For ideas, you can check out the AMWA annual meeting program and develop courses based on those topics. I offer a course in the business aspects of medical writing called "[Everything you need to know to start your freelance medical writing business](#)." Even though I am teaching future medical writers, not my clients, some course graduates, years later have become my clients when they decided to get a staff job or have experienced overflow as a freelancer.

7. Other Random Ideas

Here are some other random ideas: you can give webinars (paid or free); write an ebook or two (not a lot of money, but great for getting your name out there); or simply specialize in a really hot area (health economics for example). I have one writer on my team on whom I pile all the health economics pieces because she knows a lot about this topic. She's very busy! Get yourself on video (eg, on Facebook, YouTube, and/or LinkedIn). Know that very few people feel comfortable on video, especially when they first start, but it's a great opportunity to increase the "know, like, and trust" factor with your clients. Try starting a meetup group for science, medical, and technical writing in your area.

It's important to remember that one constant between today and twenty years ago is that people still don't like to be sold, and it's more important than ever to add value and to be consistent in what you put out. You want to attract rather than promote. If you give enough value, rest assured that it will come back to you--somehow, some way and your competition will fall by the wayside. That has not changed.

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Community Commons offers a wealth of data that is easy to report and map

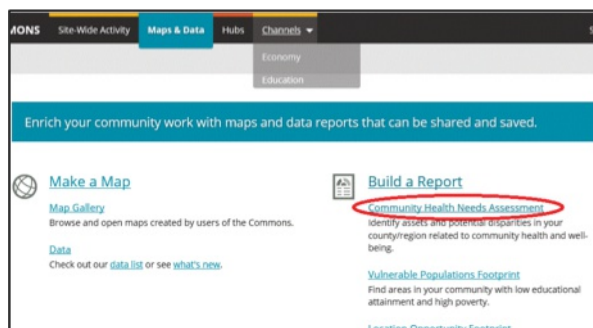
community profile using this site, you must create a user account. Doing so is free and easy. Just visit www.communitycommons.org and follow the instructions.

Once you have successfully logged in, select the 'Maps & Data' option from the menu at the top of the page. From there, you can browse available maps and reports, or you can customize your own. There are several links of interest on this page; however, popular report options are located under the section titled 'Build a Report'.

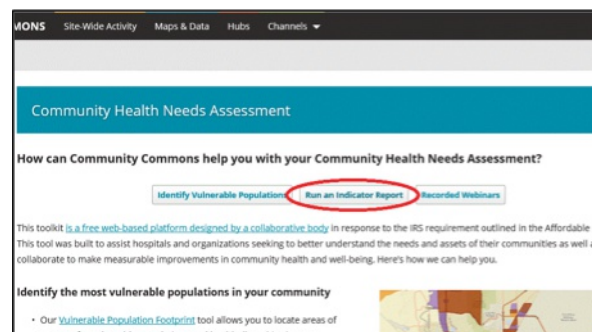
Example: To provide a quick example of what can be done using Community Commons, I took the following steps to determine the number of children receiving free or reduced price lunches in Marion County, Indiana.

1. Log into Community Commons and select 'Maps & Data'
2. Select 'Community Health Needs Assessment' from the 'Build a Report' menu (Screenshot 1)

Screen Shot 1



Screen Shot 2



3. Select 'Run an Indicator Report' (Screenshot 2)
4. From the drop-down menu, select Indiana and then Marion County
5. Select View Report

The standard report includes six main categories:

- Demographics
- Social & Economic Factors
- Physical Environment
- Clinical Care
- Health Behaviors
- Health Outcomes

To view information in each category, select the appropriate link in the ‘Data Category’ area near the top of the report (Screenshot 3).

Screen Shot 3



After viewing the basic report, you can save it, download the data used to generate it, or examine specific subcategories within the data (e.g., disability within a population or health insurance coverage). To provide data for the chosen example, I selected ‘Social & Economic Factors’ and then ‘Children Eligible for Free/Reduced Price Lunch’. Several data points on this topic were provided, including state and national comparisons to Marion County. Screenshot 4 below is a table produced by Community Commons.

Screen Shot 4

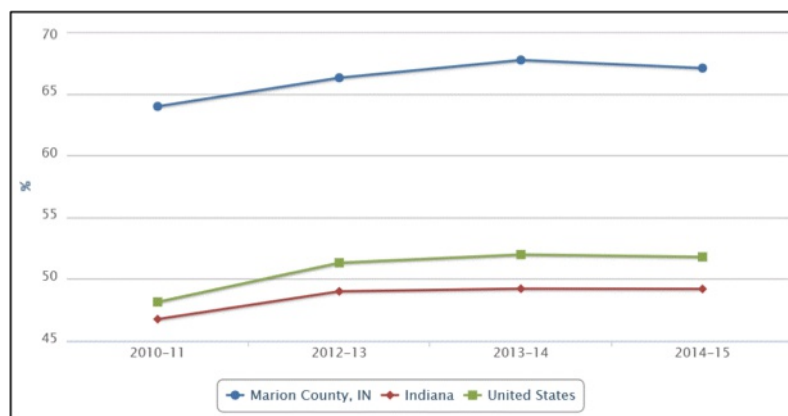
Download Data			
Report Area	Total Students	Number Free/Reduced Price Lunch Eligible	Percent Free/Reduced Price Lunch Eligible
Marion County, IN	154,068	103,329	67.07%
Indiana	1,045,813	513,987	49.21%
United States	50,436,641	26,213,915	52.12%

Note: This indicator is compared with the state average

Notice that the data are available to download so that you can create your own table or graphic. The data source is also clearly cited.

Community Commons provided more in depth data on this topic as well, including the following graph of children eligible for free lunch between 2010 and 2015 (Screenshot 5).

Screenshot 5: Youth Eligible for Free Lunch: 2010-2011 thru 2014-2015



As you see, this map also includes state and national comparisons.

A high resolution, customizable and exportable map of percentages of youth receiving free/reduced lunch at each school throughout Marion County was also produced by my query. In the interest of space, however, I am not providing it in this article. If you follow the above instructions, you can produce and view it on your own. You might also want to view the 'Identify Vulnerable Populations' tool. It opens with poverty and education indicators; however, you can add other indicators from a large menu of options. Move the sliders to adjust the indicator thresholds in use. You can also overlay community health clinics, hospitals, geographic boundaries, and more with just the check of a box.

Community
Commons
resources can
help your
organization
get funding

What do circadian rhythms have to do with remote working?

who boasted that they get into work between 5 a.m. - 7 a.m. In their eyes, anyone starting work by 9 a.m. (or later than them) was viewed as late or as someone who doesn't take his or her job seriously. However, that is just not true.

Let's face it, a lot of time at work is spent with chatty co-workers, having constant interruptions from people who not just want, but need to talk all day because of boredom, or it's their coffee break and now, out of politeness, you are forced to listen to what they have to say. If you work in an open workspace environment (this just means you have little to no privacy whatsoever) you also have to contend with the continuous Miss America waves from people walking past your desk, regardless if you are busy or not. Sometimes, a quick friendly wave or a brief eye contact is a person's cue to come and talk. All of these factors can add up and be draining for the person who simply is trying to get their work done, meet a deadline, or who simply doesn't feel like being social at that moment.

Remote

Progressive employers are realizing that people do not all have the same circadian rhythms and that people are just hard-wired differently. Some simply function better in the mornings, while others, let's just say, function better later in the day. Both sets of people have boosts of energy at different times of the day. Why wouldn't a company want to benefit from both types? Now, I know you are asking yourself what do circadian rhythms have to do with remote working. Well, if you are not a morning person, the time and energy spent on getting dressed, making coffee, and commuting, are much harder to do. If you are working from home, you can save up to 2 hours from that morning ritual and use that time for actual work. That in itself can be invaluable to an employee. All the person has to do is wake up in the comfort of his or her home, fix coffee (if needed) and log on to be at work. Maybe the employee has a doctor's appointment early in the morning or mid-day. Why does one need to go through the morning hassle, when you can work from home until the appointment and log in after the appointment, whatever time that may be?

It's good to point out that people who work from home tend to put in more hours because they are not being constantly distracted and can focus better. They also want to show the employer that work is being completed and are more motivated to prove themselves. Sometimes, an employee just needs to get away and complete silence (if you can get it) gives you the ability to think, focus, and perform. Yes, there will be cases where it's better to come into the office (perhaps to get away from the inevitable home distractions), but my point in this article is that the option should at least be there.

Sometimes working 8 hours or more is a necessity but sometimes it isn't. Some days are busier than others and some days, it is just not. Nevertheless, it all evens out at the end of the workweek. Without distractions, lunch breaks or lunch outings, one can literally get all the necessary work completed within 4-5 hours. If working from home, as long as the job gets done, you would now have the time to tend to other things in life that needs your attention, such as laundry, grocery shopping, and family time. Moreover, you won't be so tired. That to me equals work-life balance.

This is quickly
becoming the
wave of the
future

Technology

In this day and age of technology, if you have a laptop and access to your company's databases, a lot of work can be performed at home (or wherever there is a Wi-Fi connection). Skype for Business, also known as Instant Messenger, allows you to see who is available online to answer questions. It also allows you to never miss a meeting via video chats and conference calls. You can dial into the meeting, be a part of it, and even see the meeting's PowerPoint presentation via your laptop.

Human Resources

In addition to an attractive compensation package, some employers are offering flexible work options as an added benefit to working at their company. This is quickly becoming the wave of the future and the new normal because remote work can save company lots of money as well as make employees loyal and

happy, and a happy employee will ultimately help the company's bottom line.

Denise is a native of Chicago, Illinois. She is a graduate of Governors State University (Biology), Keller Graduate School of Management (MBA), and University of Chicago (Medical Writing and Editing Certificate) who is passionate about writing, reading, science, fashion, make-up, dogs, and TV talk shows. She is a Technical Writer at a Fortune 500 pharmaceutical company. She is married to a teacher/ballpark writer, residing in Fishers, Indiana along with their two fur babies, Zuri and Sox. Follow Denise on Twitter @denise_viquez.



Personality Profile: Denise Viquez

Interview by Adeleke Adeyemi, BS

Tell me a bit about your background. How did you first get started in Technical Writing? What's the connection with Medical Writing? Back to your background, what other things did you do before technical writing?

My background includes a Bachelor's degree in Biology. After graduation, I received a position as a Quality Control Chemist at a company formerly known as Centeon and Adventis Behring. After 2 years, I went to Abbott Laboratories and worked as a Documentation Editor and Validation Consultant. While working at Abbott, I completed my MBA.

When I became a technical writer, I met some Scientific Communicators, also known as Medical Writers. I had never heard of this role before but I became quite intrigued as they dealt with the science aspects. I believe having a background in technical writing is a great background to have when trying to get a role as a Medical Writer. Well, at least so I have been told. In 2016, I enrolled in a Medical Writing and Editing course and completed my certificate to aid me in my future medical writing role.

What are some of the factors that inspired you?

Accomplishing set goals, helping others with work tasks, and overcoming challenges and obstacles.

What would you consider your first big break in the industry?

In 2005, I moved to Indy for a Validation Consultant position at Roche Diagnostics. When that project ended, my supervisor asked if I'd be interested in a technical writing project. I had never heard of this type of role before and told him I wasn't sure. He went on to say that I could do this as it mainly updating and maintaining documentation. So, I went for it and I've been technical writing ever since.

Who were some of the mentors you've met along the way? Who are some of your mentors?

Seasoned technical writers who have taught me a few tricks of the trade that I've met on the various jobs.

What books and other forms of preparation would you recommend someone starting out in the industry read or familiarize themselves with?

In addition to my degrees, I enrolled in an on-line Technical Writing Course, which came with a textbook. It was helpful and I had the opportunity to connect with other Technical Writers who discussed some of their on-the-job challenges. Technical Writing for Dummies is also helpful.

What's your #1 piece of advice—like a make-or-break mantra—for people who want to get started, or advance their career in technical/medical writing?

Persevere. Stay positive and be consistent with it – someone is always watching you. Network with people, all kinds of people can offer you some tips, not just those in the industry. Everyone has value. You're braver than you believe, stronger than you seem, and smarter than you think. - Winnie the Pooh.

What blogs and kinds of books do you read regularly?

I usually Google topics I am interested in and it may lead to blogs. LinkedIn.com is where I get a lot of technical writing/medical writing articles. In addition, the AMWA forum sends daily emails and blogs from those in the industry. I don't have too much time to read books so I subscribe to audible.com to get all my books read to me. This consists of politics and business empowerment.

Tell me about some of the hurdles you have faced in your career of choice.

Some hurdles I've had to deal with are mainly people. There are just some people who are hard to get along with. They are often people in position of power so they are not interested in getting along with others. The key is to stay positive, do your job to the best of your ability, talk it out with a confidant that will keep you encouraged and motivated. I think this goes for any job.

Where do you see yourself in your career in the next year? The next five years?

Medical Writer in Regulatory.

Adeleke Adeyemi is a Consumer Service Associate (Member Services) with Anthem, Inc., in Indianapolis, Indiana. He has written for the African Media and Malaria Research Network (AMMREN) journal, Eyes on Malaria.

**2017 AMWA National Conference: Member Reviews**

Dana Blue, MS:

What a wonderful conference we had this year! I truly enjoyed several aspects of this year's conference – the venue, class choice, the Florida networking area. It is always great to reconnect and build new connections at these events. The location was amazing (see attached photo) – lights, sights, and sounds. I, like many, got blisters on my feet trying to take it all in. The classes I enjoyed the most were those that “taught the science of ...”. But all the classes I

attended had capable, knowledgeable instructors (some were very entertaining) providing information such that novice and experienced participants learned something new. If you haven't made plans to attend next year ... what are you waiting on???

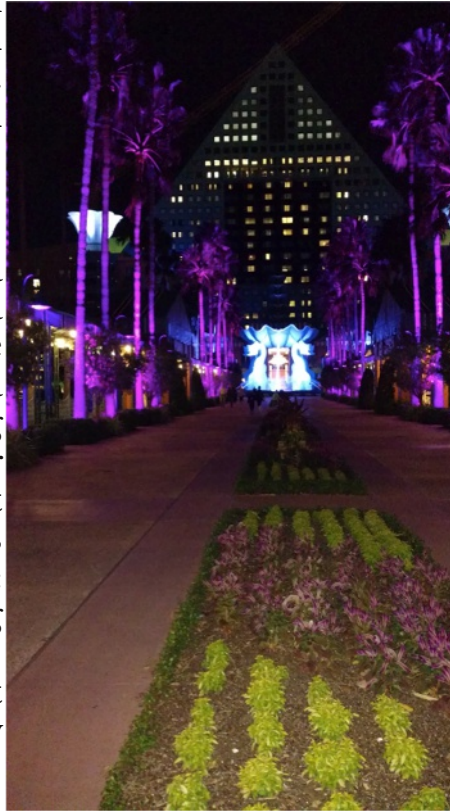
Tatiana Salazar, PhD:

It is strange to think that it was only a year ago that I started my career as a medical writer. The decision to trade days spent in the laboratory as a research scientist for days sitting behind a computer all day as a writer is one my friends still do not understand. To me, being a writer is everything I could hope for it to be: exciting, rewarding, and challenging enough to always be interesting.

After almost a year as a writer, I hit another milestone in my career: my first AMWA conference.

I must admit that I had never heard of AMWA before starting my new career. However, my coworkers have been involved in AMWA through the years, and they all had great things to say about the sessions and workshops. It is no exaggeration to say that I by the time November came around, I was really looking forward to attending.

My conference experience started with a workshop: Sentence Structures and Patterns. I found it to be very interesting. Instead of lecturing on the “best way” of writing, the class took a group discussion approach, emphasizing that sometimes what sounds most natural and is the easiest to comprehend is the best way. It was fascinating to see how the different workshop attendees' backgrounds affected what sentence structure sounded most



Thank you Dana for sharing a picture of the 2017 conference venue!

natural to them. As my work colleagues are all people whose educational and professional experiences are very similar to my own, I had not realized just how unique the voices of colleagues from different backgrounds could be.

This realization quickly became the recurring theme of the conference for me. As I attended the various education and general sessions, I kept being surprised at how much the paths of other medical writers differed from my own. It was enlightening to see how their backgrounds played into their style of communication. The people I encountered made me recognize that even among my peers what I would consider “obvious” or “natural” may not be obvious or natural-sounding at all.

I have always tried to take my readers into account when writing, but AMWA made me realize that I may not have understood just how diverse those readers may be. I now try to take a step back and evaluate my work with a more critical eye. Does it read as well as I think it does? Is my message getting clearly across? Would my audience (be it peers or otherwise) agree with me?

Overall, the 2017 AMWA annual meeting was a great learning and networking experience for me. It has helped me grow as a writer and opened my eyes to new possibilities. I am already looking forward to attending again in 2018!

September 21, 2017
Chapter Networking
Dinner at Maggiano's.
Special thanks to Barbara
Lightfoot for providing
this excellent photo of our
chapter members!



[The Catalyst Leadership Experience](#)

- When: Tuesday, January 9, 2018 from 7:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. ET
- Where: Grand Wayne Convention Center, 120 West Jefferson Blvd, Fort Wayne, Indiana 46802
- How: Register [online](#)
- Cost: \$189 includes training materials, lunch, and snacks
- What: Interactive discussions with senior executives and leaders, a networking event, panel discussions, tools, and hands on application and activities for many real-world leadership topics. You select workshops you want to engage in throughout the day.