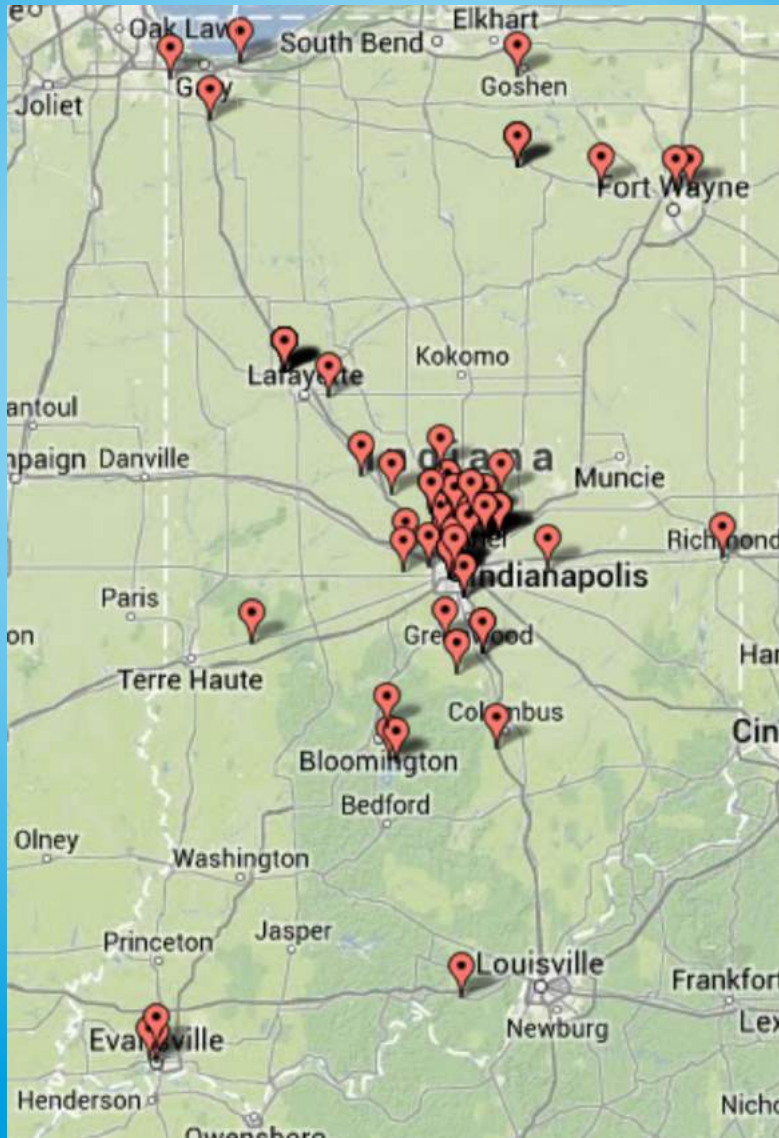


# AMWA

## *Indiana Chapter Newsletter*

August 2018



# American Medical Writers Association Indiana Chapter

## Executive Committee 2017-2018

### Officers

President	David Caldwell, PhD
President-Elect	Tenille Lawson, PharmD
Secretary	Angela Beeler, CRA
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Member Resources	Esther Brooks-Asplund, PhD
Program	Barbara Lightfoot, BS, CCRP
Publications	Rachel Foster, MPH
Social Media & Marketing	Tenille Lawson, PharmD

## Newsletter

**Editor** Rachel Foster, MPH

### *Coming Attractions*

November 1-3, 2018

**AMWA 2018 Medical Writing & Communication Conference**

Renaissance DC Downtown Hotel

Washington, D.C.

### 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](#)

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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](#).



## Still Fresh After All These Years

By Lori Alexander, MTPW, ELS, MWC

Someone asked me the other day how long I'd been a medical writer. When "33 years" came out of my mouth, I couldn't believe it. I never thought I'd be doing anything for that long. For someone who can't do the same task for more than 2 consecutive hours in a day, how did I get to 33 years doing the same thing every day without dying of boredom?

Because I haven't really been doing the same thing every day. Throughout my career, I've tried to stay fresh by working on different types of medical communication and challenging myself to learn new topics and skills. My Keeping It Fresh plan has avoided boredom, stimulated my brain, honed my skills, and, perhaps most importantly, kept me an engaged medical communicator. AMWA has played an integral role at every professional step over the past 20 years.

### My Story

My debut in medical communication was as an editor at a large teaching hospital. My job entailed editing manuscripts in a wide range of specialty areas, so I was always learning new things. After 2 years, I went to work as an editor at an orthopedic journal, where I stayed for 10 years. Not that I equate myself with Picasso, but I consider those 10 years my Blue Period. I'd always wanted to be a writer, and it pained me to just edit every day, on the same broad topic. But I was going to school for a master's degree in technical and professional writing, and I had to hold tight. I consoled myself with creative writing every nonworking hour, and that outlet got me through. The advantage of the job is that I became an experienced editor, which is not all that common among writers. When the tedium of editing every day became too much to bear, I had to do something new. A friend told me about openings for instructors of night courses at a community college. Although I

I've tried to  
stay fresh

was honored, it was difficult to think about teaching because I was so frightened by public speaking. I decided I needed the challenge, and I went for it. I taught Business Communication and Medical Terminology and got over my fear of public speaking (mostly). I came to love creating lesson plans and fun assignments, enjoyed interacting with students, and felt a wonderful sense of achievement when students “got it.” This new undertaking was refreshing.

**I was so  
frightened by  
public  
speaking**

**I finally left the editing job to move to a professional association where I could at last write, but it meant moving to another state and giving up teaching. The excitement of the new position compensated for the loss. I now had the opportunity to write for a range of publications, from the association’s annual report to summaries of scientific presentations. I moved up the ladder to manage several publications—and people—and eventually I found fulfillment in planning the strategic direction of a variety of publications. Those skills came in handy when I applied to become the AMWA Journal editor. I had been an AMWA member for only a few years, and the position offered a challenge. When I was chosen, I embraced my new role, even though it meant that between the editorship and my demanding job, I was working about 70+ hours a week.**

The problem with moving up the ladder when you’re employed is that you end up having less time to do what you really love, which for me (like most of us), is writing. After 6 years as an employee, I left the fancy office for life as a freelance, a career move that was simultaneously exciting and a tad scary. I would still have to do things other than writing. In fact, I would have to take on many roles to run my business—be my own IT, my own bookkeeper, my own everything. On the up side, though, I could choose my clients (theoretically) and write about what I wanted to (theoretically). With solid experience as both a writer and an editor, I took on jobs in both areas, and this variety has helped immensely. When I’m just “not feeling it” with writing new content, I can turn to an editing job. When editing becomes monotonous, I can turn to the delight of creating a new document or publication. I work in a

## I am committed to learning—and doing—new things

variety of specialty areas now, and in a range of medical communication settings. This mix keeps me from being bored...most days.

Now in year 14 of my freelance career, I've become more selective about jobs. I strive for a mix of editing and writing projects. I try to focus on therapeutic areas I know, and I choose clients carefully. But every so often, I have to break out of my box and try something new—or something old again. For example, early on, I did a great deal of conference coverage, but the travel and stress wore me out. When I was asked to take on this type of work a few years ago, I remembered the exciting aspects of it, and I decided to try it again. Yes, the work is stressful, but it's also energizing, and I gain such a feeling of accomplishment in turning around stories so quickly. In small doses, this kind of job helps keep my work fresh.

I am also committed to learning—and doing—new things. Learning about such topics as social media as a professional tool, visual communication, health literacy, plain language, storytelling, engaging presentations, instructional design, and differences in learning and communication styles across generations. I learn through subscriptions to online alerts, TED talks, YouTube videos, expert blogs, online courses, AMWA educational activities, and networking with AMWA colleagues. I also search for software and apps that will enhance my productivity. A commitment of just 15 minutes or so a day revitalizes my passion for medical communication, and I am always able to apply my new knowledge to my work in some way.

### **The Role of AMWA in My Story**

As I mentioned earlier, AMWA has been integral at every phase of my professional life. After 10 years as editor of the AMWA Journal, I still loved the position, but I felt I was beginning to lose my freshness with it. I needed to move on, and so did the Journal. I ended my tenure and began to volunteer for AMWA by serving on the Board of Directors. In my first role on the Board, I was called on to use the skills I had mastered in organization and project management and apply them in a new area—planning the AMWA



Annual Conference. This position was gratifying, as have been my 5 years on the AMWA Board of Directors. Being on the Board calls for strategic thinking, brainstorming for new ideas, and discussing ways to enhance the field of medical communication. These responsibilities led me to learn about trends in our profession, the educational needs of medical communicators at various levels, and best practices for a nonprofit association. Service on the AMWA Board opened a new world to me, filled with transferrable knowledge.

AMWA also offered the opportunity to return to teaching. I began by leading roundtables and soon followed with open sessions and workshops. My work with AMWA increased my professional exposure, and the University of California, San Diego Extension recruited me as faculty for a new online medical writing certificate program it was developing. I had never taught an online course, but I threw myself into this new job, learning as I went along. Developing and teaching these courses have required me to keep up with trends and technology in the medical communication field, which in turn has enhanced my own knowledge and skills. I have become passionate about education and teaching and am now working on developing my own educational resources on medical communication. I have found that teaching is the best way to learn.

### **Lessons Learned**

At various points in my 33-year career, I felt stagnant. Doing the same thing over and over got old, and it decreased my productivity and dampened my mood. But never did I contemplate leaving the profession. Instead, I tried to rise above it all and challenge myself to do something out of my comfort zone. Overcome a fear of public speaking to teach. Move from editing to writing. Accept new types of work. Learn new technology. Gain knowledge in different areas. Challenging yourself can be daunting, but it is fulfilling and rewarding in the end.

Work-life balance also helps. When I was working 70+ hours a week, I was often too weary (emotionally or physically) to learn

**Service on the  
AMWA Board  
opened a new  
world to me**

## You will never find time for fun—you have to make it

new things or even to make time for fun and relaxation. Once I started to structure my time better so I could enjoy time off, I found myself more productive when I worked. This concept is really a no-brainer. What better way to charge yourself and feel fresh than to turn yourself completely off for awhile. I now start every day with an hour of water aerobics (a definite perk of living in Florida), and I am truly enthusiastic about starting work every day after that fun in the pool. I also take a mid-day break to play the piano; a half hour at the keyboard clears my brain for the second half of my work day.

My story may be similar to that of others and very different from that of many. But even people who are employed, rather than freelance, can benefit from lessons I've learned. You may not be able to work on a wide variety of documents or publications, but you can ask your supervisor about how to add some variety into your work. You may not want to teach, but you can share your expertise in other ways that are equally rewarding. For example, be a subject matter expert for an AMWA educational activity or be a mentor to an up-and-coming medical communicator. Volunteering for AMWA opens avenues for networking and becoming more involved in our profession. Keeping up with technology helps ensure that you or your work does not become outdated. The explosion in technology is frightening, especially for those of us "of a certain age." But learning new software programs and apps not only is fun but also can make your work easier. Lastly, stop trying to find time for fun; you will never find the time—you have to make it. Schedule it on your calendar. Taking the time to do what you love is the recharge you need to remain engaged in your work.

Now that I think about, I'm proud to say I've been a medical communicator for 33 years...and I'm still fresh.

### Ways to Stay Fresh

- Challenge yourself to take on new roles
  - o Write different types of documents
  - o Volunteer for AMWA



- Volunteer for an organization with a mission you support
- Mentor medical communicators
- Teach
- Learn something new
  - Engage in AMWA educational activities
  - Participate in free online courses
  - Network with AMWA colleagues
  - Try out new technology
  - Read articles and blogs about trends in medical communication and health/medicine
  - Listen to TED talks
  - Teach
- Schedule time off for fun
  - Participate in exercise or sports
  - Write creatively
  - Play (or learn) a musical instrument
  - Practice meditation, yoga, or other relaxation techniques
  - Read

*Ms. Alexander is the immediate past president of AMWA and the president of Editorial Rx, Inc.*