

1996 AMWA Annual Conference Report

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This year's annual meeting of the American Medical Writers Association (AMWA), held in Chicago, Illinois, 6 to 9 November, attracted more than 700 participants. CBE members were prominently represented, as they presented workshops, led roundtable discussions, and received recognitions.

The theme of the annual conference was "Meeting the Challenges, Making the Transitions". In keeping with this theme, the editing/writing plenary session considered the future of style manuals in an electronic age, featuring insiders from the *Chicago Manual of Style (CMS)* and the American Medical Association's *AMA Manual of Style*.

The 1st speaker, Margaret Mahan, managing editor of the University of Chicago Press, which publishes the *CMS*, said that she expects many changes to be made in the coming years, to both the form and content of *CMS*. First, she said, although the manual "is made of paper and will continue to be paper", she nonetheless predicts that the next edition of *CMS*, likely to be available after 2001 AD, will have an electronic version as well. Also, Mahan expects the coming edition to consider electronic publication more fully, offer advice on the citation of electronic sources, and use "computer-friendly language", as she believes that most of the work of editors and writers will be completed via computer.

Cheryl Iverson, director of the Division of Editorial Processing at the American Medical Association and longtime CBE member, said the 9th edition of the *AMA Manual of Style* contains numerous changes as well. The new edition, expected to be available late next year, will have an expanded copyright section, consider electronic documents and processing, and offer examples of editing online. The 9th edition will

also follow the lead of the CBE style manual, *Scientific Style and Format*, with regard to numbers and eponyms, Iverson said. An electronic version of the *AMA Manual* will be available online as well, she said.

While Mahan and Iverson represented style manual publishers, Mary Heffner, manuscript editor with the *American Journal of Neuroradiology*, represented style manual users. Heffner expressed a fear that the urge to modernize at all costs, a pressure she says many journal editors feel in the age of the electronic revolution, could affect journal quality for the worse. "Editorial quality can suffer in the electronic age", Heffner said, as publication speed and monetary savings grow in emphasis. For this very reason, editors will have still greater responsibility as filters and verifiers, she says.

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Heffner defended the need for style manuals in the modern editorial office, both as a benchmark for the editorial process and as a tool for educating authors about the need for clarity and accuracy in the preparation of manuscripts. At the same time, she feels better style manuals are needed, as growing time pressures make it impossible to research every question of style. Each of the 3 speakers agreed that both writing and using style manuals will be challenging for years to come.

Audiocassettes of this and other selected sessions are available from Teach'em, 160 East Illinois Street, Chicago IL 60611 (phone: 312-467-0424).

In addition to the plenary session, many editing-related workshops were offered. Among these were "Macroediting", "Microediting", "Sentence Structure and Patterns", "Statistics for Medical Writers and Editors", "Essentials of Copyediting", "Proofreading", "Telecommuting for the Medical Editor", and "Demonstrating Your Perceived Value as a Medical Writer/Editor".

Many longtime CBE members gave workshops this year, including Maryalice Ditzler, E. Ann Donaldson, Janice Fleming, Phil Fontanarosa, Barbara Gastel, Carol Kornblith, Marianne Mallia, Faith McLellan, and Marie Morgan. Also, Barbara Good was Forum Chair and Moderator for the afternoon-long paper presentations of the "Communicating in Medicine" plenary session.

The conference also included 60 roundtable discussions scheduled over 2 days. Topics included "Justifying Our Existence: Measuring the Value of Medical Writing and Editing", "Proofreading: Tips and Techniques", "Editing the Multiauthored Textbook: Blessing or Curse?", "Grammatical Pitfalls in Medical Editing", "Slide Design and Editing", "Using Checklists to Systematize Your Document Review", "From Print to Electronic Media: Transitions a Writer or Editor Makes", "Expediting Review and Revision of Manuscripts", and "The Editor's Dilemma: So Much to Do, So Little Time".

Roundtable discussion leaders included CBE members Susan Aiello, Lynn Alperin, Gillian Brown, Helen Hodgson, Thomas Lang, Phyllis Minick, Karen Phillips, Poly Potter, Pamela Powell, Mary Royer, Meg Waters, and Julie Yamamoto.

In addition to teaching a workshop this year, Marianne Mallia was among the award recipients. She was chosen as an AMWA Fellow for her significant contributions to AMWA and her exceptional professional accomplishments. AMWA's next annual conference will be held 12 to 15 November 1997 in Boston, Massachusetts. ⑥