



The AMWA-GCAC Connection

July 2026

Welcome!

This is our 3rd edition of our new quarterly newsletter! To our returning readers: Welcome Back! To our new readers: Thank you for joining us! We are happy you all are here and excited for all the opportunities we will have to connect and network! The AMWA-GCAC serves Chicago, Wisconsin, and the surrounding suburbs of Chicago. We are always busy doing interesting and exciting networking activities. There are plenty of opportunities to connect and network. We hope you find the information shared here to be enlightening & inspiring. Please reach out to Diane Brooks to submit your articles on relevant topics, tips on medical writing & editing as well as relevant classified ads at dbrooks5316@sbcglobal.net.

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What We've Been Up To

Summer Networking Event - Chicago South suburbs

Written by Sandra Lee, PhD



On Saturday, June 27, 2026, the AMWA-GCAC held a summer networking lunch from 12:00-2:00 PM at The Foxtail restaurant in Downers Grove, a suburb in DuPage County approximately 22 miles southwest of Chicago. The 15 members in attendance introduced themselves and ordered from the restaurant's extensive and varied menu of breakfast and lunch entrees. Some attendees were new members, and some were longtime members, including the current GCAC president, Teresa McNally.

Although most had never met before, conversations were lively and focused on academic backgrounds, career paths, work experience, and plans for the July 4th celebration of America's 250th birthday. Attendees learned that their academic backgrounds, career paths, and work experience were as varied as the restaurant's

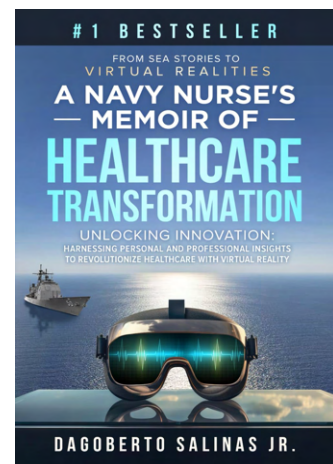
menu. Many attendees earned PhD degrees in the life sciences, cell biology, molecular biology, or biochemistry, and two attendees earned PhD degrees in engineering. Some are currently working or have worked on-site or remotely as medical writers in academic or industry settings. Others are currently working or have worked remotely as freelance medical writers or medical editors. Altogether, attendees enjoyed great food and shared spirited conversations, abundant laughter, and a sense of community. This networking event showed attendees that medical writing and communication truly is a big tent that welcomes everyone!

Virtual Book Club

Our quarterly virtual book club meetings offer a chance for engaging with other members and enjoying enlightening discussion. Members from other AMWA chapters are always welcome and you don't have to have read the book to participate!

A Navy Nurse's Memoir of Healthcare Transformation **by Dagoberto Salinas**

Written by Teresa McNally, PhD



Our Q2 book club book "*A Navy Nurse's Memoir of Healthcare Transformation*" was presented by the author, Dagoberto (Dago) Salinas Jr., MSN, ACCNS-AG, CNOR, VA-BC, a retired US Navy Nurse Corps Commander and mission driven entrepreneur. Dago founded CLINSPEC solutions and co-founded ComplyDash, two distinct technology companies, after completing over 20 years of distinguished Navy service, where he served in Bethesda MD, Okinawa Japan, San Diego CA, Jacksonville FL, San Antonio TX, and Afghanistan. He is a pioneer of extended reality (XR) training, AI tools, and

automated compliance management, with a mission to use his skills to transform healthcare.

As a peri-operative combat nurse Dago provided care to multi-trauma patients. Later, Dago worked as a Command Compliance Officer and Navy Hospital Corps School Instructor. He gained experience with advanced computer techniques including augmented reality (AR) early in their development, and while he could see the advantages of the technology, he realized that the deliverable could be improved. After retiring from the navy, Dago became certified as a Vascular Access Specialist and during this time founded CLINSPEC solutions with XR technology to train clinicians in vascular access. He found traditional training didactic and impractical. Unskilled students caused patients a lot of pain and stress as they attempted to perfect their techniques. The CLINSPEC product fills a training/practice gap by allowing clinicians to practice virtually in a simulated environment.

In his memoir, Dago writes about his Navy career and how it influenced his career choice to become an entrepreneur. His only writing experience was as a content editor but he was committed to telling his story. In the book, Dago shares the technique he used to complete his book in 3 months: he went on walks simultaneously dictating his thoughts into his phone to approximate at least 500 words of text daily. This disciplined approach sped up the writing and thinking process and quickly led to a first draft and made the writing easier.

During our book club meeting Dago also talked about entrepreneurship which led to a group discussion in which attendees related their experiences in freelancing to Dago's experience of founding and developing his companies. He emphasized that entrepreneurship is primarily about using skills and experiences to bring people together to reach a common goal.

The book is part of his legacy, but also serves as an effective marketing tool and as his business card for new clients as he takes the time to write a note on the inside cover and gifting it which has proved helpful in developing strong relationships.

This was an inspirational presentation especially for medical writers interested in writing a book. His story is a true privilege to learn about and he encouraged all of us to tell our story. I strongly recommend this book.

In Case You Missed It



Webinar: Freelance Contracts - What No One Tells You

Written by Sharon Rogers, PhD, ELS

On May 28, Brionna Ned, The Lawless Lawyer, conducted a webinar entitled “What No One Tells You About Contracts” to AMWA members. Brionna is a former Big Law lawyer and in-house counsel for startup companies. She currently works as a consultant. Her mission is to equip freelancers with the legal know-how to achieve their business goals and build and sustain a successful freelance career.

Brionna’s passion for familiarizing her audience with contracts and legal language was evident. Throughout the webinar, she defined legal terms in plain language.

Brionna recommended that freelancers always work with a signed contract. She explained that the purpose of the contract is to define the working relationship and to allocate risk appropriately between the client and the contractor since both the freelancer and the client assume risks when working together. The number one risk for a freelancer is getting paid on time. Other risks include project delays, client responsiveness, scope creep, and getting sued. The number one risk for a client is faulty performance by the freelancer, not completing a project within the timeline, poor quality work and inefficient work that costs more money. Other risks include maintaining

ownership of client intellectual property and getting sued by a third party. To minimize the risks for both parties, contracts should state the payment structure and terms, late fees, confidentiality, policies, intellectual property ownership, indemnity, warranty, and insurance requirements.

Other discussion points included the connection between contracts and project management and how a well written contract helps prevent scope creep, project delays, and specifies the work performed. When leverage is written in contracts it helps to ensure best practices and avoids lawsuits when projects have bad outcomes.

Brionna also recommended that all contractors create and use their own contract rather than agreeing to the client's contract, if possible. Freelancers have more options when they set the contract terms with their personalized contract. In contrast, the client's contract may be boiler-plate – not written with freelance writers in mind, or a template downloaded from the internet. Brionna provided examples of potential disasters that can occur if freelancers work without a contract.

The webinar was informative, well attended, and the audience was very engaged. Brionna left time for questions and attendees engaged in discussion with questions and examples of real-life situations. Moreover, a recording was available for two weeks for people who registered but were unable to attend.

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Spotlight - Someone You Should Know

Conducted & written by Diane Brooks, MMS, PA-C

Alice Zhao is a new medical writer transitioning from working as a biomedical doctoral researcher in the field of neuroscience & biomedicine. As an undergraduate she did research in microbiology and immunology and later received her master's in Neuroscience in London. She is also a post-doctoral scholar of Northwestern University. She has a PhD in Biomedical Science with extensive laboratory experience. As a doctoral researcher she has written & edited manuscripts for publication in journals, written literature reviews and research study protocols and presented research findings in written reports, slide decks and posters. Alice has also designed graphics and figures for scientific publications and presentations. It was a pleasure to speak with her & learn more about her career path.



DB: As an undergraduate you majored in microbiology & immunology and later received your master's in neuroscience & your PhD in Biomedical Science. What interested you about medical writing?

AZ: Despite leaving academic research, I still enjoyed writing and reading about clinical research. While figuring out the next step in my career I found out about the field of medical writing through AMWA and attended the Chicago chapter 2025 virtual conference.

DB: What interested you about freelancing as a medical writer?

AZ: I didn't plan on it [freelancing]. During my job search, I looked up job postings on AMWA's Job Center and saw an ad for a freelancer and was hired by a small company as an independent contractor.

DB: What do you find most satisfying about freelance medical writing?

AZ: I always liked the independence of writing and also collaboration of the team involved in putting a document together. I value community and find this very fulfilling.

DB: What area of medical writing interests you most?

AZ: Initially, regulatory. Because of my interest in clinical research writing I would like to move to regulatory writing in the future.

DB: What are some obstacles you've faced as a new medical writer?

AZ: I've found in transitioning from academia to industry there is a different language in the medical writing field and you have to know how to speak the language of the field. In resume writing, understanding the lingo for job searching has presented some job market shenanigans. An entry level job listing requiring experience to get experience can be derailing as one may not know to just apply anyway. Also, I was concerned about generative AI eliminating entry level medical writer jobs. Now, I have a better understanding of the medical writing landscape regarding AI as a tool and don't believe AI can take over.

DB: What advice/tips you've received proved fruitful?

AZ: Networking is key. Making organic connections and being intentional about the connections I pursued and maintained. Also being clear about my goals, why I want to be a medical writer & what area I want to go in and finding a mentor in that area. Also, joining AMWA.

DB: What advice do you have for someone looking to transition to the field of medical writing?

AZ: Join AMWA. Network. Be persistent. You are your own best asset. Remember that you have the skills to make it and they are valuable. Learn to reframe your skills to fit the industry. As Sharon Rogers, PhD, ELS shared in our previous newsletter: Become an expert in MS Word.



Writer's Corner

Advancing Medical Writing: Applying Agile Project Management Frameworks to Medical Writing Workflows



Written by Urvashi Bhatia, PhD

As known to medical writers, document development is a multifaceted process that extends well beyond writing. It requires coordination of numerous document components, collaboration with cross-functional stakeholders, and adherence to scientific, editorial, and regulatory requirements. While producing accurate, compliant, and well-written content remains the primary responsibility of medical writers, effective project management is important to ensure that deliverables are completed on schedule. But what project management strategy works well for medical writers?

Traditionally, document development has been managed using the Waterfall methodology, in which work progresses through sequential phases such as planning, drafting, review, quality control, approval, and final publication or submission. This structured approach aligns well with projects that have clearly defined milestones and limited scope for change. However, medical writing projects frequently evolve during development because of protocol amendments, emerging scientific evidence, regulatory authority feedback, or reviewer comments. These changes often require flexibility that a strictly sequential process may not readily accommodate.

Agile project management methodology offers a more adaptive alternative by dividing large writing projects into smaller, manageable tasks that can be completed iteratively. Regular communication among writers, reviewers, and subject matter experts enables continuous feedback, allowing revisions to be incorporated throughout the document development process rather than only at predetermined review stages. This iterative workflow promotes transparency, facilitates early identification of issues, and supports

continuous improvement while maintaining progress toward project deadlines. Scrum and Kanban are the most suitable frameworks founded on Agile principles for organizing and managing work for medical writers.

Scrum is designed for work delivered in planned increments. It organizes activities into fixed-duration sprints supported by defined team roles and recurring events such as sprint planning, daily stand-up meetings, sprint reviews, and retrospectives. This framework is particularly useful when deliverables can be developed in successive iterations with clearly defined objectives.

Kanban, by contrast, emphasizes continuous workflow rather than time-boxed iterations. Tasks are displayed visually on a board that tracks work from initiation through completion. By limiting the amount of work in progress and making task status visible to the entire team, Kanban helps identify bottlenecks, accommodate changing priorities, and improve workflow efficiency. These characteristics make it especially valuable for medical writing projects that involve frequent revisions, multiple parallel activities, and variable review timelines.

A hybrid framework, Scrumban, combines elements of both approaches by integrating Scrum's structured planning with Kanban's continuous flow and visual task management. This flexibility makes it well suited to teams that require predictable planning while responding to evolving project demands.

Various project management platforms have been developed that facilitate Agile ways of working. Trello provides a simple, visual Kanban interface that is easy to implement and is well suited for individuals or small teams seeking straightforward task organization. ClickUp offers extensive customization, multiple task views, and support for hybrid workflows, making it appropriate for projects with greater complexity. Microsoft Planner integrates with the Microsoft 365 ecosystem and supports collaborative task management using Kanban-style boards, making it a practical option



for organizations already using Microsoft applications. However, Scrum and Kanban can also be used with simple physical task boards without software.

Identifying what project management framework and platform you select for your writing project depends on the nature of the project. Regulatory medical writing, for example, is governed by fixed submission timelines and formal review milestones, making the structured scheduling of Waterfall valuable for major deliverables such as draft completion, quality control, approvals, and submission. At the same time, Agile practices can enhance day-to-day management by providing visibility of writing progress, review cycles, revisions, and approvals. Consequently, a hybrid approach that combines Waterfall for milestone planning with Agile techniques for execution often provides the greatest benefit for regulatory writing teams.

Regardless of the methodology selected, successful implementation depends on consistent application across the project team. Clearly defined workflows, regular communication, and transparent task management enable medical writers to devote more time to producing high-quality, compliant documents while meeting critical project deadlines.

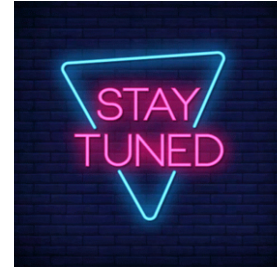
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Stay Tuned...

Mentorship Program

Stay tuned for our AMWA-GCAC pilot mentorship program headed by our President, Christine Weisshaar, MS. This 10-week pilot will launch this fall and will run approximately from September through February. It will start small with a regulatory writing cohort of four (two mentors & two mentees). Mentors & mentees will be matched based on their needs & interests with pairs meeting monthly for one hour. Please email Christine at clweisshaar@gmail.com if you are interested in being a mentor or mentee. First priority will be given to chapter volunteers in regulatory writing as a thank you for their service. Christine hopes to expand the program to possibly freelance or medical communications, etc.



Join Us!

Our next virtual book club will be held in September. We will be discussing the book, *Clarity by Design - Comprehensive Checklists in Medical Communication* by Kelly Schrank.

All are welcome to join us!



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