

Quill

Summer 2002, Volume 8, Issue 2



Calendar of Events

Saturday, June 29, 2002

“Family-friendly”
outing to National
Museum of Health
and Medicine



October 31–

November 2, 2002

AMWA Annual Conference,
San Diego, CA

Do we have your current email address?

To reduce mailing expenses, the chapter would like to communicate with members by email as much as possible. If you are not currently on the chapter's email list, please contact our email list coordinator, Michael Altus, MichBALT@aol.com, and ask him to add you to the list. Also, if your email address has changed, please avoid bounced messages by sending Michael your new address. Thank you!



Visit the National Museum of Health and Medicine

Save the date: Saturday, June 29

Please join us on Saturday, June 29, 2002, for a family outing to the National Museum of Health and Medicine, located on the campus of Walter Reed Army Medical Center in northwest Washington, DC. The agenda includes an interactive presentation, a museum tour, and time to socialize over a box lunch.

Registration for this event is limited to 40 adults and children. Due to the sophisticated nature of some content, the suggested minimum age for children is 10 years.

Beginning at 10 a.m., anatomical curator Paul Sledzik will lead a hands-on presentation of human skeletal biology. He'll discuss the bones of the body and how we can derive forensic information, such as sex, age, race, stature, and pathology, by studying the skeleton. Participants will examine actual bones and bone casts during the 45-minute presentation.

After that, we'll take a guided tour of the museum, where the world of medicine meets the world of weird. You can compare a smoker's lung to a coal miner's lung, see the bullet that took Abraham Lincoln's life, or check out surgical instruments used in a Mobile Army Surgical Hospital like the one portrayed on television's *M*A*S*H*. A current museum feature is the traveling exhibit “eMotion Pictures,” a multimedia display of works created by artists whose lives have been touched by orthopedic conditions.

The organized activities will wrap up at around 12:30 p.m., after which you're welcome to continue to explore the museum on your own.

If you haven't signed up yet, visit our Web site (www.amwa-midatlantic.org) for directions and a registration form. You can find out more about the museum, including details of current exhibits, by visiting its Web site at www.natmedmuse.afip.org.

– Tamia Karpeles, ELS



Message from the Immediate Past President

It has been my honor and pleasure to serve as your AMWA Mid-Atlantic Chapter president for the past year. I've been especially gratified that whenever we requested assistance—whether soliciting candidates for office, volunteers to serve on an audit committee or to help with hospitality at the AMWA annual conference in Norfolk, or someone to maintain our member database—you folks always volunteered. You took time and energy from your busy professional and personal lives and helped your AMWA Mid-Atlantic Chapter become stronger and more responsive to its members. It is rare indeed to be able to say that about a voluntary membership organization.

So, thanks to all of you for being involved in what is, of course, *your* chapter. The camaraderie that exists at chapter meetings, even among members who've never met before or who've only

“met” via email, is incredibly heartening. I hope that spirit of helping and working and having fun together will continue for many years.

Heartfelt thanks is due to the chapter Board of Directors. By the time you read this, **Susan Atlas** will have been elected our new president. As president-elect this past year, Susan has admirably shouldered responsibility for arranging chapter meetings, including topics, speakers, logistics, and food.

Tamia Karpeles, our president-elect (as you read this), has been an active Board member this past year, especially taking on the editorship and upgrading of our Web site. **Maryalice Ditzler** continues for a second 2-year term as our treasurer, using her well-honed financial skills to keep our treasury in good shape. **Nancy Wachter** has served faithfully as our secretary for 2 years and is “retiring” from chapter leadership, as is Board member **Bill Glitz**. **Cindy Hamilton** and **Susan Farrer** are continuing as Board members for the second year of their 2-year terms.

Joining the Board for 2-year terms are **Sharon Williams**, our new secretary, and **Bruce Dan** and **Janice Deal**, new Board members. I'm certain they will bring fresh ideas and energy to your AMWA Mid-Atlantic Chapter.

Other chapter members and friends who've helped us out in the past year and will continue to strengthen our chapter include **Michael Altus**, email list coordinator; **John Wachter**, Web site designer; **Margot Fromer** and **Gayle Scott**, membership committee; **Rich Kapit**, database manager; **Jennifer Sizemore**, Core Curriculum workshops coordinator; and **Jenifer Walker**, newsletter production editor. Special and continuing thanks go to **Eleanor Mayfield**, who most recently served the chapter as immediate past president and who has now taken on the editorship of the *Quill*. Eleanor's devotion to our chapter has continued for many years, and I am especially grateful for her extensive knowledge of our chapter's past endeavors and accomplishments.

I look forward to seeing many of you at upcoming chapter events!

— Donna R. Savage, MEd, ELS
Immediate Past President

Coming Soon: AMWA Workshops via Distance Learning

AMWA is looking at ways to make several of its Core Curriculum workshops available (for credit) to members who cannot attend national or regional conferences. The format for the distance learning workshops will be a CD-ROM accompanied by a book. A Web-based format was considered but would have required a significantly greater upfront investment (potentially tens of thousands of dollars).

AMWA is negotiating to develop its first distance learning workshop with a company that produces educational books and accompanying CD-ROMs for medical-specialty, psychological, and other organizations. AMWA member and workshop leader Flo Witte has volunteered to convert her Basic Grammar workshop as the first distance learning course. A final product may be available by late spring of 2003.

Mid-Atlantic Web Site Development, Part 2: The Survey

As you may recall from the last issue of the *Quill*, I've taken on the role of content editor for our evolving chapter Web site (www.amwa-midatlantic.org). So far, however, I've had virtually no content to edit.

Before launching a major drive to develop content, the chapter Board of Directors decided we needed to know what the membership wants out of the Web site. So we circulated a survey asking members to rate possible content items as follows:

- personally useful
- not personally useful, but potentially useful to other members or prospective members
- not useful

I reviewed other AMWA chapter Web sites to develop the list of possible content items, then added several open-ended questions, hoping to solicit other ideas and insights.

Survey results

Thirty people responded to the survey, representing just over 10% of all members who elect to receive chapter email. Almost all respondents added recommendations to the listed content areas or answered at least some of the open-ended questions.

Every item on the survey was rated either personally useful or potentially useful to others by a majority of those who expressed an opinion. The areas most frequently chosen as personally useful included announcements of chapter events, an opt-in member directory, and job postings. Answers to the open-ended

questions were varied, thoughtful, and insightful. In my next report, I'll describe them in more detail.

Meanwhile, thanks to everyone who responded to the survey. I now have a starting point for framing the development of our Web site. The next step is for John Wachter and me to determine what's technically and logistically feasible.

As many organizations besides ours are discovering, it takes a huge amount of ongoing labor to develop and maintain a Web site. My take-home message is this: Our chapter's Web site depends entirely on volunteer efforts, and it will live (or die) by member involvement.

Vital asset

I'll be actively recruiting your help in researching and writing text for all content areas. So start thinking now about whether there's a page or portion of the Web site you'd particularly like to "adopt." Then get in touch with me (tamia@toad.net or carpefelem@netscape.net).

If enough of you are willing to take on a piece of this project—permitting John and me to make the pieces work together—we can build a Web site that will serve as a vital asset to everyone in our chapter.

I'm confident that John will build us a site that's pleasing to look at and easy to navigate. The quality, vitality, and energy of our content will determine whether that site flies or plods over time. Let's make it fly.

* To review the entire text of the survey with response figures, go to our Web site: www.amwa-midatlantic.org.

— Tamia Karpeles, ELS

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Saturday Morning Proteomics

On Saturday, February 23, Jessie Wolfe, PhD, gave Mid-Atlantic Chapter members an edifying introduction to the field of functional proteomics, describing the fascinating science underlying the drug discovery efforts of Human Genome Sciences (HGS), Inc., where she heads the medical writing team.

HGS is in the vanguard of this promising new field of drug discovery. In contrast to gene therapy—which has sought to address the biochemical roots of diseases by altering the chromosomal information in a patient's cells—HGS is instead intent on isolating and employing specific proteins to combat human diseases ranging from breast and colon cancer to Alzheimer's disease and ulcers.

This proteomic strategy affords some potential advantages over gene therapy, yet it still capitalizes on the wealth of information that can now be gleaned from the map of the human genome and the increasingly well-defined libraries of genetic information that are being built and categorized by laboratories around the world.

Target proteins

Dr. Wolfe led attendees through a review of Crick's *Central Dogma of Molecular Biology*—basically, how nuclear DNA encodes RNA, which in turn is translated into protein products in the cytoplasm of cells, and how this process is generally regulated.

She went on to explain that with functional proteomics, HGS is essentially aiming further downstream than gene therapy does: Rather than tackling repairs at the genetic level—which is perilous in part because genes frequently are pleiotropic (i.e., one gene may be involved in many physiological processes; therefore, altering a problem gene to address a single disease or symptom may have serious unintended consequences)—the company instead screens genetic libraries to identify target proteins to use as drugs. These proteins are often far more specific in function and far less toxic in terms of dosage- and side-effects than conventional drugs.

Dr. Wolfe reviewed HGS's product development process: how it creates cDNA (copy DNA) libraries, then screens these enormous genomic libraries for proteins of therapeutic value, and finally handles

the logistics of animal and human trials. She illustrated each step with descriptions of the biochemical mechanisms, disease indications, and preliminary results of a number of promising trials. She also addressed many of the technical challenges (including overcoming protein instability and issues of dosage and targeting) of implementing these new therapies.

Exciting area

The hour-long talk covered the length and breadth of this exciting new area of biopharmacology and neatly accomplished what we medical writers strive to do every day: It harvested a crop of well-spoken good sense from the abstruse technical jungle of modern medicine.

The talk, given at the University of Maryland's Shady Grove Center in Rockville, MD, was attended by nearly 40 chapter members from all over the region. It concluded with a Q&A session in which Dr. Wolfe expanded on certain technical issues of her talk and also addressed her experience with many professional and personal aspects of being—and becoming—a medical writer.

Last but not least, attendees and speaker were treated to an amply catered lunch, which afforded an opportunity for more discussion of proteomics, career development, and—here and there—even some informal social discourse!

—Ned Rust

* An audiotape and overheads of Jessie Wolfe's presentation are available for use at local meetings of Mid-Atlantic Chapter members. For more information, please contact Cindy W. Hamilton, cindy@hamiltonhouse.org or 757-481-2799.

She's a Winner

Congratulations to Susan Causey of Medifacts International in Rockville, winner of the free copy of *Stedman's Medical Dictionary, 27th Edition* that we offered to encourage responses to the Web site survey. Susan was the lucky winner of a drawing held at the annual chapter dinner on May 23. (Thanks to Nancy Wachter and Lippincott Williams & Wilkins for donating the dictionary!)

Southeast Satellite...or, What's in a Name?

Like many AMWA chapters, the Mid-Atlantic Chapter covers a large geographic area and faces a continuing challenge in providing programs to members living in remote areas, such as the southeast corner of the Mid-Atlantic region.

The chapter encourages members to hold regular local meetings. The southeast satellite of the Mid-Atlantic Chapter has been meeting locally for more than 3 years. Meetings are usually held in Williamsburg, midway between Richmond and Hampton Roads. Meetings usually include lunch and either a speaker or a discussion topic.

The southeast satellite is searching for a suitable name. Hampton Roads is an official name, but it is not widely recognized outside the area. Tidewater Virginia is a popular name, but it is not "official." Both of these names have the disadvantage of excluding Richmond.

February program

- "Herbal Drugs and Food Supplements: Underappreciated Cures or Overadvertised Cure-Alls?" was the title of the program on February 27, 2002. Gayle Nicholas Scott, PharmD, BCPS, discussed differences in the regulation of drugs and dietary supplements. Dietary supplements—defined as substances intended to supplement the diet—include vitamins, minerals, hormones, whole plant material, extracts of plants, amino acids, and miscellaneous other "natural" products (e.g., creatine, glucosamine, melatonin). Dietary supplements are not considered foods, food additives, or drugs.

Dr. Scott emphasized that existing regulations do not require dietary supplements to provide

dietary or nutritional benefit. In contrast, both prescription and nonprescription drugs are regulated by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), which requires that these conventional drugs be proven effective and safe before they are permitted on the market. Dr. Scott also discussed some of the most common herbal and supplemental products, which led to a lively discussion.

May meeting

- "FDA Drug Approvals in 2001" was the topic of the May 22 meeting. Lynn Limon, PharmD, a drug information specialist at the Medical College of Virginia Hospitals, discussed new drugs in the fields of cardiology, gastroenterology, infectious disease, psychopharmacology, and pulmonary disease. Limon compared new

drugs with older agents and identified potential advantages or the lack thereof. She also reviewed relevant drug-related issues from 2001 such as drug with-



drawals and new warnings.

- The September meeting will be a potluck supper at Cindy Hamilton's house in Virginia Beach. At the May meeting, AMWA members considered meeting simultaneously in both Norfolk and Richmond but agreed that the advantage of networking with members from both areas offset the advantage of driving shorter distances to meetings.

- The southeast satellite welcomes new members and suggestions for future meetings. To be added to the email list, please contact Gail McMenemy, gmcmenamin@cox.net.

The Mid-Atlantic Chapter is eager to help AMWA members form additional satellite chapters. AMWA members in southeast Virginia are happy to share their experience with other chapter members interested in organizing local meetings.

– Cindy W. Hamilton, PharmD

Should the Mid-Atlantic Chapter Offer a Scholarship?

The Mid-Atlantic Chapter of AMWA needs *your* help to research the possibility of offering a scholarship and, if warranted, develop a proposal to the chapter Board of Directors.

The purpose of the scholarship would be to offer new professionals in the medical writing field, or students with an interest in the field, the opportunity to explore careers in this profession.

Three AMWA chapters currently offer scholarships.

- The New England Chapter offers 1-year AMWA membership to a new medical communicator, defined as having 1 to 3 years of experience.
- The Ohio Valley Chapter offers registration fees and expenses for attending its regional conference to a college student.
- The Southwest Chapter offers a \$500 cash

award and 1-year AMWA membership to a college student who is studying science, allied health, English, journalism, or communications, or enrolled in a course or internship in biomedical or life sciences communications.

The Mid-Atlantic Chapter's scholarship exploration committee will "meet" via email, so geography is not a barrier to participation. This is a good opportunity for prospective volunteers who do not live in the Washington-Baltimore area. Committee members will correspond with other chapters that offer scholarships to determine what lessons they have learned. If the committee members decide that the Mid-Atlantic Chapter should offer a scholarship, they will develop a proposal for the Board of Directors.

To volunteer to serve on the scholarship committee, please contact Cindy Hamilton, cindy@hamiltonhouseva.com or 757-481-2799.

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