



Geoff Hall Scholarship Winner 2013

Where does medical writing fit in research?

'The Editor's Foreword' in *The Frankenstein Diaries*,¹ 'translated from the original German and edited by The Reverend Hubert Venables', asked the readers to believe that the legend of Frankenstein was indeed true.² The book was filled with diagrams of the experiment carried out by Dr Victor Frankenstein, the scientific equipment used at that time and excruciating details of the 'creature' or 'monster' that was created.

While we know that this was a mere work of fiction, the fact remains that no research can be communicated to people unless it is documented in a precise and clear fashion. The art of communicating scientific information by specialised writers is known as Medical Writing. With the advancing technology, an increasing number of scientific developments are being made continuously. Different kinds of information need to be communicated clearly to different target audiences.³ While pharmaceutical companies might be most interested in clinical study procedures and drug regulatory dossiers, researchers would focus on compiling their studies clearly for publication in scientific journals. Similarly, people buying medical products would expect clear instructions to come along with the packaging, and medical writers are sought to prepare the promotional literature, brochures, and handouts for healthcare products.

Some of the oldest documents on medical studies found include *De medicina*,^{4,5} written by Celcus, said to be a physician himself who lived between 25 BC and 50 AD, the Kahoun⁶ papyrus dating back to 1950 BC, which talks about human medicine, veterinary medicine, and mathematics and the Ramesseum IV and V papyri, dating back to around 1900 BC. Thus, it is evident that writing has been an integral part of medical research from centuries ago. Producing documents that are not well written will not help transfer knowledge to others, and neither will it be useful to those interested in making advancements in that field.

As technology has made it easier for scientists to generate more data, effective analysis and interpretation of the data is the need of the hour. Although medical writers are not required to carry out the research themselves, they have a strong understanding of the subject in order to interpret the results and present them in a simplified manner. Unless the objectives and results of a study are presented in a simplified and appealing way, one cannot expect people to understand the significance of the study. Hence, it is vital to be a skilled medical writer who can decide on the most effective ways to present data from research.

Another aspect of carrying out research is getting grants in order to carry out the proposed studies. This is where Grant Writing comes into play, and medical writers help facilitate research by writing effective grant proposals for scientific studies. It is important to write a persuasive research proposal such that the application stands out, and results in obtaining funds. Certain funding agencies might need the proposals to comply with



certain guidelines or formats. Hence, one has to be very methodical and cautious while working on any such proposal.

Medical Writing also includes Medical Journalism, an area that helps bridge the gap between the scientific community and the general public. Medical Journalism strives to give the public an insight into the research carried out by scientists. It could be quite difficult for a layman to understand the latest scientific developments by reading scientific journals. Hence, it is important to simplify the data while presenting it to the readers and yet, make them understand the research as closely as possible. Besides, a medical journalist has to be very careful while writing reports and cannot go ahead with it without understanding the research very well. Since scientists explain their studies on a very technical level in journals, it is possible that they might find it difficult to explain it in an over-simplified way to the general public. This is where a medical writer or medical journalist comes into the picture, and formulates an articulate report such that the essence of the research is intact and the communication barrier between scientists and the public is bridged.

Summing up, I feel that communicating one's research to the scientific community as well as to the general public is equally important, and requires skilled writers having a scientific background. Medical Writing is an essential part of research and aids scientists in communicating their findings to the world. As Crandall *et al.*⁷ put it, even though technology is changing the way scientists engage in research or teach, 'the written word remains one of the most important means for communicating that information to others'.

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