Results of the 2012 EMWA salary survey

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Abstract

EMWA members were surveyed in late 2012 and early 2013 about their current salary levels. A total of 320 individuals responded. Most were women, between 31 and 50 years of age, and native speakers of English or German. About half had 2–10 years of experience. Mean annual income was €61 505 (median €54 000), more than 10% higher than reported in 2006. Men earned more than women and income rose with work experience and responsibility. Highest academic degree and native language did not appear to influence income, but members with an EMWA Professional Development Programme certificate earned more than those who did not. The results suggest that salary depends more on professional skills and knowledge than on formal requirements and might be increased by gaining experience and expanding professional skills; however, formal conclusions about influencing factors cannot be made because statistical comparisons were not performed due to potential sample bias.

Keywords: Medical writer, Salary, Income, Survey, Language, Experience

Introduction

The first EMWA salary survey was conducted in 2006.[1] In that survey, 145 members answered the structured questionnaire. The survey was repeated in late 2012 and early 2013 to obtain a more current picture of the salary levels of medical writers and medical communicators within EMWA and to see how they have changed in recent years. Factors that typically influence salary levels, such as education and work experience, were analysed.

Methods

Salary survey

The present survey was based on the 2006 questionnaire with a few alterations (see Supplemental material 1 http://dx.doi.org/10.1179/2047480613Z.000000000135.S1). Questions on age, native language, and document language were introduced; some of the answers to multiple choice questions were slightly modified for subject of academic degree (to include 'other life science'), EMWA Professional Development Programme (EPDP) certificates (multidisciplinary and specialised foundation certificates now recorded separately), classification, and size of employer (pharmaceutical and biotech companies grouped together; company offering medical writing services and government body introduced; employer size adapted for smaller companies and institutions), job title (translator and regulatory affairs specialist introduced), and job activity (training included as an option). Finally, a 10-point scale was introduced for job and salary satisfaction questions.

The survey was set up as an online questionnaire using Survey Monkey (http://www.surveymonkey.com). EMWA members were invited to participate via email, social media, and an announcement on the EMWA website. A reminder was sent to all invitees. The survey was open for participation from 5 November 2012 to 8 January 2013. All answers were collected and kept strictly confidential. Missing data were not queried.

Statistical analysis and calculations

Data on demographics, background, and job characteristics were calculated for the full analysis set, which was defined as all individuals responding to the survey. Means, standard deviations, and medians were calculated for the salary analysis set, defined as all individuals providing income data. Missing values were not replaced. Non-Euro currencies were converted to Euros using exchange rates for 28 January 2013 (€1 = £0.8580; €1 = 1.3463 US dollars; €1 = 131.6129 Pakistani rupees; €1 = 1.2936 Australian dollars; €1 = 1.2477 Swiss francs; €1 = 8.6368 Swedish Kronor; €1 = 7.4605 Danish kroner; €1 = 72.7431 Indian rupees; and €1 = 1.6669

Singapore dollars). Pearson's correlation coefficient (r) was calculated for income vs. job satisfaction, income vs. income satisfaction, and income satisfaction vs. job satisfaction.

Results

Respondent characteristics

A total of 320 EMWA members responded to the survey. The majority of respondents (70%) were women, and most (74%) were between 31 and 50 years of age, most (70%) spoke English or German as their native language (Table 1), and most (68%) had an advanced academic degree. The most common fields of study were biological and other life sciences and healthcare (81%). About half of the participants had 2–10 years of experience in the field of biomedical communication and 83% described their role as 'Medical Writer'. Most worked for pharmaceutical or biotech companies (31%), contract research organisations (30%), or a company offering medical writing services (18%). Of women, 24% reported working part-time, whereas only 5% of men reported working part-time. Over 50% spent more than half of their working time on writing activities. Common additional activities were editing, proofreading, quality control, supervision or administration, and training. The workload covered all types of documents to a rather similar extent. Most of the respondents were fairly satisfied with their work and salary.

Of the 320 respondents (full analysis set), full-time equivalent income levels were provided by 223. Characteristics of the respondents in the full analysis set and for those providing income data were similar.

Gross annual income

Two respondents were excluded from further analysis because their reported salaries were considered to be too low to be plausible: a medical writer from Pakistan who reported a salary of €270/year and a medical writer from Denmark who reported a salary of €6916/year.

Mean annual full-time gross income was €61 505 (median, €54 000). Mean annual income was €68 026 (median, €59 750) for men and €59 218 (median, €53 057) for women. The mean full-time equivalent income of part-time employees was slightly lower than for full-time employees (€58 855 vs. €62 040).

Table 1: Native languages of participants in the EMWA salary survey ($N = 320$)

Native language	*n* (%)
English	160 (51.0)
German	61 (19.4)
French	23 (7.3)
Dutch	10 (3.2)
Spanish	9 (2.9)
Danish	6 (1.9)
Indian	6 (1.9)
Swedish	6 (1.9)
Flemish	5 (1.6)
Italian	4 (1.3)
Greek	3 (1.0)
Polish	3 (1.0)
Portuguese	2 (0.6)
Russian	2 (0.6)

Table 2: Income according to job satisfaction ($N = 220$)

Level of job satisfaction	*n* (%)	Gross annual income (€)		
		Mean	SD	Median
0–3	25 (11)	46 545	16 549	43 706
4–7	110 (50)	57 134	24 514	50 058
8–10	85 (39)	71 839	43 101	67 560
Salary vs. job satisfaction Pearson's *r*				0.29

Job satisfaction was assessed using a 10-point linear scale, where 0 indicated absolute dissatisfaction and 10 indicated absolute satisfaction.

Relationship between annual income and job and income satisfaction

Fewer than one in five respondents were dissatisfied with their job or with their annual income (job or income satisfaction score 0–3), while approximately 40% reported being very satisfied with their job and with their salary (job or income satisfaction score 8–10) (Tables 2 and 3). There was no clear correlation between actual salary and either job satisfaction ($r = 0.29$) or salary satisfaction ($r = 0.32$). However, salary satisfaction correlated with job satisfaction ($r = 0.78$).

Relationship between experience and annual income

Mean annual income rose between €5000 and €10 000 for every additional 5 years of work experience (Table 4). Senior medical writers with supervisory tasks earned more than twice as much as medical writers at the entry level. Salaries increased

Table 3: Income according to income satisfaction ($N = 220$)

Level of income satisfaction	*n* (%)	Gross annual income (€)		
		Mean	SD	Median
0–3	39 (18)	46 993	21 845	42 000
4–7	88 (40)	57 539	22 958	52 250
8–10	93 (42)	71 596	41 942	65 000
Salary vs. salary satisfaction Pearson's *r*				0.32

Income satisfaction was assessed using a 10-point linear scale, where 0 indicated absolute dissatisfaction and 10 indicated absolute satisfaction.

Table 4: Income according to work experience ($N = 221$)

Experience (years)	*n* (%)	Gross annual income (€)		
		Mean	SD	Median
<2	26 (12)	41 267	21 577	35 483
2–5	52 (24)	51 381	23 555	44 000
6–10	68 (31)	63 236	25 126	55 038
11–15	36 (16)	68 131	22 481	71 282
>15	39 (18)	79 363	55 090	70 000

Table 5: Income according to seniority and responsibilities of job ($N = 220$)

Seniority/level and supervisory responsibilities	*n* (%)	Gross annual income (€)		
		Mean	SD	Median
Entry level	27 (12)	37 962	11 712	37 762
Middle – no supervision	67 (30)	50 563	19 270	46 620
Middle – supervision	30 (14)	62 560	27 570	55 600
Senior – no supervision	60 (27)	68 329	27 031	65 995
Senior – supervision	36 (16)	87 751	53 802	78 419

in steps of approximately €6000 to 12 000 with advances in career, with a larger increase (nearly €20 000) at the highest level (Table 5). Variability (i.e. standard deviations) increased in parallel.

Relationship between income and type of employer and country

Mean annual income for medical writers working for pharmaceutical or biotech companies was about €20 000 more than for medical writers working for other types of employer and was lowest for writers working in academia, although only four writers were included in this category (Table 6). Mean annual income, converted to Euros, was highest and over €90 000 in Switzerland, Denmark, and Australia and lowest and below €39 000 in 'other' countries (India, Ireland, Poland, Portugal, and Singapore) and Italy (Table 7).

Table 6: Income according to type of employer ($N = 214$)

Employer	*n* (%)	Gross annual income (€)		
		Mean	SD	Median
Academic	4 (2)	50 348	13 965	46 183
Communications agency	21 (10)	59 208	23 457	57 000
Medical writing services company	41 (19)	59 930	55 333	43 000
Contract research organisation	66 (31)	52 626	17 564	48 000
Pharmaceutical or biotech company	69 (32)	70 753	25 622	67 560
Other[a]	13 (6)	73 372	41 238	72 000

[a]Self-employed (9), pricing and reimbursement, and market access (1), medtech (1), publishing (1), and a non-profit organisation (1)

Table 7: Income according to country ($N = 216$)

Country	*n*	Gross annual income (€)		
		Mean	SD	Median
Austria	3	46 800	14 058	39 600
Australia	3	90 188	15 621	92 764
Belgium	13	51 927	14 679	43 200
Denmark	7	90 870	18 572	93 291
France	15	71 385	79 684	54 000
Germany	57	66 979	26 021	65 000
Italy	4	38 111	21 829	30 822
Netherlands	6	50 450	15 492	47 600
Spain	8	60 250	39 329	48 500
Sweden	4	62 924	11 719	65 997
Switzerland	11	111 578	17 971	112 206
UK	76	49 086	19 066	44 289
USA	3	84 429	23 375	71 307
Other (India, Ireland, Poland, Portugal, and Singapore)	6	37 521	23 366	30 967

Relationship between income and language

Mean annual incomes for English and non-native English speakers did not differ greatly (Table 8). Similarly, annual incomes were similar among writers who predominantly write documents in their native language and those who predominantly write in a foreign language (Table 9). Also, annual income was similar for native-English and non-native-English speakers writing in English (Table 10).

Relationship between income and education

Mean annual income was roughly the same for those with a bachelor's, master's, or advanced degree, although medians increased with the level of education (Table 11). On average, medical writers with a background in humanities were earning less (mean, €53 383) than medical writers who studied in the fields of biological sciences (mean, €60 318) or healthcare (e.g. in medicine or

Table 8: Income of native English speakers vs. non-native English speakers (regardless of document language) ($N = 220$)

Native language	*n* (%)	Gross annual income (€)		
		Mean	SD	Median
English	113 (51)	60 286	29 277	49 534
Non-English	107 (49)	62 684	37 492	55 200

Table 9: Income according to whether documents are written in native language ($N = 220$)

Document language	*n* (%)	Gross annual income (€)		
		Mean	SD	Median
Documents not written in native language	100 (45)	62 586	38 183	55 600
Documents written in native language	120 (55)	60 800	29 044	50 816

Table 10: Income of native English speakers vs. non-native English speakers where most documents (76–100%) are written in English ($N = 175$)

Native/non-native	*n* (%)	Gross annual income (€)		
		Mean	SD	Median
Native English speakers	91 (52)	60 119	28 438	52 448
Non-native English speakers	84 (48)	64 811	40 428	58 550

Table 11: Income according to academic degree ($N = 221$)

Degree	*n* (%)	Gross annual income (€)		
		Mean	SD	Median
Advanced (MD, PhD, or equivalent)	156 (71)	62 394	34 728	55 000
Master's degree or equivalent	30 (14)	59 104	32 054	53 000
Bachelor's degree or equivalent	35 (16)	59 601	28 849	49 500

Table 12: Income according to EPDP certification ($N = 220$)

Certification	*n* (%)	Gross annual income (€)		
		Mean	SD	Median
No EPDP certificate	153 (70)	59 632	35 849	49 534
EPDP certificate	67 (30)	65 443	26 973	60 606
Total	220 (100)			

pharmacy; mean, €67 004). Finally, mean annual income was higher for respondents with an EPDP certificate than for those who did not have a certificate (Table 12).

Discussion

This salary survey, conducted between 5 November 2012 and 8 January 2013, was completed by 320 EMWA members. This was a good response given that EWMA included approximately 1000 members at that time. In addition, this was more than in the 2006 survey, which included 145 EMWA members.[1]

Salaries also rose from an average of €54 924 (median, €50 000) in 2006 to €61 505 (median, €54 000), suggesting that employers are increasingly aware of the importance of and are willing to invest in professional medical writers. There was substantial variability in salaries, suggesting that the medical writing professional market is still developing.

This survey found that annual income increased with experience and position. Compared with the 2006 survey,[1] mean annual incomes increased for middle level writers and senior writers with no supervision but changed little for entry level medical writers and senior medical writers with management responsibilities. Medical writers with a scientific or medical background appeared to have higher incomes than those with a humanities background, although only nine respondents were included in the latter group, precluding firm conclusions. The level of formal education appeared to have little influence on income, but the results were not broken down by years of experience as in the 2006 survey, which found that respondents with <2 or >15 years of experience had higher mean incomes when they had an advanced degree.[1] Interestingly, respondents with an EPDP certificate had higher average incomes than those that did not. Thus, for medical writers, income appears to depend more on technical expertise than on formal requirements and appears to be linked with gaining experience and expanding professional skills, for example, through EPDP training. However, the influence of EDPD training does not take into account the fact that employees with only a few years of work experience probably do not have the chance to complete an EPDP certificate, so this result may have been confounded by years of experience or level of responsibility.

The survey also found that job and salary satisfaction did not correlate with annual income. However, salary satisfaction correlated with job satisfaction. This suggests that it is not salary but rather work conditions that are the main factors determining satisfaction.

These survey results should allow medical writers and communicators to compare their salaries with other relevant benchmarks. However, as with the 2006 survey,[1] formal conclusions about the influence of most of the factors cannot be made because, except for analysing the association between income and work and job satisfaction, no statistical comparisons were made. Also, the number of respondents in some categories was very low. For example, several of the countries had only three or four respondents. The analysis also did not take into account cost of living or purchasing power in the respondent's country or that the respondents were volunteers and not randomly selected. Furthermore, in several cases, only indirect comparisons can be made with the 2006 results because of changes in the survey. Finally, this survey was limited to EMWA members, so the results may not be representative of all medical writers in the responding countries.

Conclusion

Overall, the mean annual income of EMWA members in this 2012 survey was higher than in 2006. The results suggested that income is influenced more by professional skills and experience than formal requirements or language. Medical writers are generally

content with their jobs and salaries, although satisfaction with salary did not correlate with the salary level, and regardless of salary, satisfaction with income was closely connected to job satisfaction.

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Reference

1. Goodwin Burri K. Results of the 2006 EMWA salary survey. The Write Stuff 2006;15(4):133–4.

Medical Writing Jumble # 8

1. Re-arrange the jumbled letters to get a meaningful word related to medical writing.
2. Next, take the circled letters from each word and make two new words that will answer the riddle in the cartoon. Hint: The answer is probably a pun.
3. Use British English.

by Anuradha Alahari

Illustration: Anders Holmqvist

SGORS

DUWON

COKBL

TRAKEM

Answer:

See page 224 for the answers.