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BIOGRAPHY

Eric Wentworth Martin – Pharmacist, Researcher, Author

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ABSTRACT

For much of its history, the American Medical Writers Association (AMWA) has bestowed awards in honor of certain members: Harold Swanberg, MD, the founder of the Association; Walter Alvarez, MD, in retirement, a nationally syndicated health columnist; Eric Martin, PhD, a pharmacist instrumental in professionalizing regulatory writing; and John McGovern, MD, a philanthropist who supported initiatives in biomedical communication. However, the details of the lives of these men are unknown to most AMWA members. Accordingly, this biography describes the life and accomplishments of Eric Martin, to recognize his achievements and to contribute to the history of the profession and of the Association.

The Eric W. Martin Award for Excellence in Medical Writing was awarded by AMWA from 2007 to 2015. However, we know more about those receiving the award than we do about the man in whose honor the award is given. In part, this lack of information may be attributed to Eric himself. He has been described as a quiet but pleasant man who seldom talked about himself; the sort of person who would learn more about you than you would about him in casual conversation. (Lilian Sablack telephone call, June 27, 2020.) We know little about his personal life and not much more about his professional life, but there is something to tell.

Figure 1. Eric Wentworth Martin, PhC, BsC, Ms, PhD (1912-?)

PERSONAL LIFE

Eric Wentworth Martin, PhC (pharmaceutical chemist), BsC (bachelor's degree in pharmaceutical chemistry), MS, PhD, was born on December 6, 1912, in Kamloops, British Columbia, Canada, to Wentworth Banger Martin (1888-1945) and Ida Magdalen (1886-1984).[1] He graduated from high school in 1928, eventually entered an apprenticeship in pharmacy, and became a qualified pharmacy assistant in 1934. At some point, he became a registered pharmacist in both the United States and Canada.[1]

We know even less about his wife, Ruth D. Martin, DSc, who collaborated with him on several publications. According to Lilian Sablack, AMWA's Executive Director from 1973 to 2001, who knew Eric for some time, he rarely talked about himself. Her recollection of him was that he had no children and that Ruth may have been his second wife.

PROFESSIONAL LIFE

Much of the information on Eric's professional life comes from the "about-the-author" sections of his many publications. At some point in his career, he was Director of Communications for Lederle Laboratories in New Pearl, New York, and for several years, he was also associate professor of medical communication at Columbia University College of Pharmacy.[2] Between 1949 and 1952, he was an Associate Director of LaWall and Harrison Research Laboratories (now SGS Harrison Research Laboratories), a company that still provides consumer product testing services.[3] During this same period, he was assistant professor of biochemistry at Philadelphia College of Pharmacy. (The college eventually changed its name to the University of the Sciences. It offered the only master's degree program in medical writing in the country[4] until it was absorbed by St. John's University earlier this year.)

From 1956 to 1959, he was Editor-in-Chief of the *Journal of the American Pharmacists Association, Practical Pharmacy Edition*,[5,6] Executive Director of Spectrum at Pfizer, may have been professor of physical pharmacy at Purdue University, and later became Director of Professional Communications at the Food and Drug Administration. He was a Fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science and of the International Academy of Law and Science. He was also a Fellow of AMWA, the first president of the Association who was not a medical doctor, and the author of AMWA's first Code of Ethics, in 1978.[2]

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But there's more…

From 1942 until 1953, Eric served in the US Army Medical Corps and Chemical Warfare Service, which was part of the Office of Strategic Services (the OSS; forerunner of the Central Intelligence Agency). At the end of this period, he became a senior research biochemist at the Institute for Cooperative Research at the University of Pennsylvania.[7] The Institute conducted secret research into chemical and biological warfare until its activities came to light during the Vietnam War in 1965.[8] The Institute was closed in 1968.[9] (A note for balance: during World War 2, George W. Merck, President of Merck & Company pharmaceuticals from 1925 to 1950, led the War Research Service that was in charge of the US biological weapons program. Merck was awarded the Medal for Merit for his contribution to the war effort.[10])

PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITIES

Almost all references to Eric are from books he wrote or edited. They all appear to be major texts that went through several editions.

- *Husa's Pharmaceutical Dispensing*. Martin EW, ed. Mack; 1959. He edited the first 7 editions of this book.
- *Remington's Pharmaceutical Science*. Martin EW, ed. 13th ed. Mack; 1965. In 100 chapters (1,616 pages) by separate authors, the book covers the scientific, professional, and economic aspects of pharmacy.
- Martin, EW. *Techniques of Medication: A Manual on the Administration of Drug Products*. Alexander SF, Hassan, WE Jr, Sherman BS, eds. 1st ed. J. B. Lippincott; 1969. Eric's wife, Ruth D. Martin, was an associated editor of this book.
- Martin, EW. *Hazards of Medication: A Manual on Drug Interactions, Incompatibilities, Contraindications, Interactions, and Adverse Events*. J. B. Lippincott; 1978. The book cites 3,000 references and contains a 400-page table of drug interactions for more than 600 of the most widely used drugs. (The number of drugs increased to 1,000 in later editions.) Another 50-page table details how many drugs interfere with the results of laboratory tests.
- Martin EW. *Drug Interactions Index* 1978/79. Lippincott; 1978.

THE DRUG THAT CHANGED EVERYTHING

Thalidomide was an over-the-counter sedative widely used in Europe to treat anxiety, sleeplessness, and morning sickness during pregnancy. In the late 1950s, it was linked to fetal deaths and serious birth defects (the phrase does not capture the horrific effects of the drug) in thousands of newborns. At the time, drugs were tested only on rodents and did not have to be tested for teratogenic effects. The drug was never marketed in the United States because its approval was blocked by a young US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) inspector. Frances Kelsey, MD, PhD—on her first assignment during her first month at the FDA— based her decision on the fact that the data in the application for thalidomide did not establish its safety and effectiveness and that there were no data indicating whether the drug could cross the placenta.[11] Despite pressure from the manufacturer and from others inside the FDA, she prevailed in preventing the drug from being approved.[12]

Dr Kelsey also noted that there were no data from clinical trials of the drug in the United States and that there was no way of knowing whether such data would be reliable. Clinical trials were not yet required for FDA approval, and any trials that were conducted were not subject to oversight. "[T]he 'clinical trials' of thalidomide in Europe involved distributing more than 2.5 million tablets of the drug to about 20,000 patients, including 3,760 women of childbearing age, of whom at least 200 were pregnant. More than 1,000 physicians participated in these trials, but few tracked their patients after dispensing the drug."[13] (Unknown to the FDA, thalidomide had already been distributed to 1,200 physicians in the United States, many of whom were treating pregnant women. The agency eventually launched a nationwide campaign to recover as much of the drug as possible.[14])

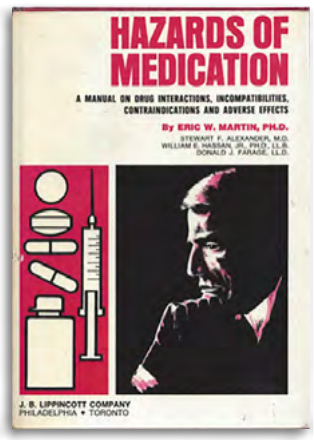

Figure 2. *The Hazards of Medication*, by Eric W. Martin, PhD. This 900-page volume contains a 400-page table of drug interactions and includes information on more than 600 of the most widely used drugs. Another 50-page table details the ways in which many drugs can affect the results of laboratory tests. The first edition sold 30,000 copies.

The thalidomide tragedy led to the 1962 Kefauver-Harris Drug Amendments to the Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act that required manufacturers to prove both safety and efficacy and greatly increased surveillance and monitoring of the drug approval process.[14] The new regulations also required manufacturers to disclose all side effects encountered in testing and to provide the public with accurate

information about the side effects and efficacy of a drug. The FDA also launched the Drug Efficacy Study Implementation, an initiative that retrospectively evaluated drugs already on the market by 1962. This tightening of regulations was global; the European Union adopted Directive 65/65/EEC1 in 1965 to coordinate the approval process in the European Economic Community, and the United Kingdom passed the 1968 Medicines Act to control the testing and manufacture of drugs for human and veterinary use.[14]

For her part in saving the United States from the same disaster Europe had experienced, President Kennedy awarded Dr Kelsey the President's Award for Distinguished Federal Civilian Service, the highest honor given to a civilian in the United States. She was the second woman to receive the award.[11]

These changes in the drug approval process and the need to meet new and extensive domestic and international licensing requirements created great uncertainty among manufacturers. To address this uncertainty, 30 pharmaceutical professionals, medical writers, and academics founded the Drug Information Association (DIA) in 1964.[15] The idea behind the Association was that "a climate of cooperation expedites the transfer of drug information from the minds of those who have it to the minds of those who need it, with a minimum of duplication of effort," according to one of the founders and its first president, Dr Eric W. Martin (Box).[2,15]

Today, the DIA has more than 22,000 members from 80 countries. Based in Washington, DC, the Association has regional offices in Pennsylvania, China, Japan, Switzerland, and India. It publishes the quarterly, peer-reviewed *Drug Information Journal*, and sponsors more than 125 meetings, trainings, and continuing education courses each year.[15]

CLOSING

The Eric W. Martin Award for Excellence in Medical Writing was bestowed on AMWA members who in the previous year published print or electronic monographs or articles on topics either for the public or for a professional medical audience.[16] The award may have been established by Eric's wife, Ruth, in honor of his life (Telephone call with Lilian Sablack June 27, 2020).

Much of Eric's life is unknown. He is not mentioned on the DIA website, and his name does not appear on Internet searches, other than as an author or on the award named for him. So, it is not surprising—and perhaps even fitting—that I still could not determine the date of his death at the time of this writing.

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THE REBIRTH OF AMWA

As horrible as thalidomide was, it also saved AMWA. From its founding in 1948 and throughout the 1960s, the Association was an organization of physician journal editors. As the physician members retired and were not replaced, membership became dangerously low. Eric became President in 1970, when the need for more complete and standardized regulatory documents increased the demand for regulatory writers, which of course was Eric's area of expertise. He and four others created much of the Association as we know it today:

Arnold Melnick, DO, Executive Vice Chancellor and Provost of the Health Professions Division, Nova Southeastern University, who, in retirement with a friend, decided to start an osteopathic school in 1980 and enrolled the first class in 1981.

Red Schifrin, PhD, a clinical researcher at Hoffman-LaRoche who became Vice President and head of Drug Regulatory Affairs and was widely regarded as an expert in drug approval. His prestige was instrumental in attracting new members and sponsors.

Bill Nelligan, the executive director of the American College of Cardiology, who (surreptitiously) donated space, clerical support, and the salary for an executive director for 2 years. He remained a loyal supporter of AMWA throughout his career.

Lillian Sablack, AMWA's first executive director, was hired in 1973. She helped establish the annual meetings and brought order to the administrative functions. (Lil was my sister-in-law for many years, and we are still close. She loved to repeat a joke I once told her "What's the difference between Lil and a terrorist? You can negotiate with a terrorist." It's funny because it's true . . .)

These 4 people reorganized AMWA, began what was called the core curriculum, established a conference built around workshops of the core curriculum, and began to appeal to new constituencies. Regulatory writers began to join, as did writers and editors in scientific publications. Later, employees of medical communication companies and contract research organizations, both of which serve the pharmaceutical industry, also began to join.

The rest, as they say, is history. (Telephone conversation with Lilian Sablack, July 2020.)

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