

FEATURE

AMWA: Who We Are

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ABSTRACT

Medical communicators are professionals with a knowledge of both medicine and writing who are able to deliver complex scientific information to a variety of audiences. As the leading professional organization for medical communicators with a membership of nearly 5,000, the American Medical Writers Association (AMWA) is well-situated to tap into their member network to better understand the diverse backgrounds and experience of medical communicators. In this article, AMWA presents the demographic data (eg, age, gender, education, and work experience) received from the Medical Communication Compensation Survey to create a snapshot of the medical writing community. AMWA emailed the most recent Web-based survey to medical writers and editors during the first quarter of 2019. Overall, 7,456 individuals received the survey, and 1,418 respondents completed the survey. About two-thirds (66.1%) of the respondents were employed by a company, similar to the 2015 survey (65.1%), whereas the remaining one-third were freelancers. Most respondents were female (83.4%), and the average age of all respondents was about 48 years. The average time spent working for pay as a medical communicator for all respondents was 12 years. Most respondents held a doctoral-level degree (46%) or a master's degree (32%) as their highest level of education. Nearly half of all respondents had their highest degree in the field of science (47.2%), whereas 9% had their highest degree in English. A key takeaway from the survey is that medical communicators are a highly educated group of professionals, indicating a commitment to continuous learning. AMWA members are encouraged to keep their member profiles up to date to provide additional demographic information to support AMWA's mission of promoting excellence in medical communication and providing educational resources in support of that goal.

Medical communicators are professionals with a knowledge of both medicine and writing who are able to deliver complex scientific information to a variety of audiences, such as health care providers, patients and their caregivers, industry professionals, and public policy officials. Individuals working in the field of medical communication may have such titles as medical editor, medical writer, scientific writer, technical writer, regulatory writer, promotional writer, and health care journalist, among many others. Medical communicators are responsible for the development of materials in formats ranging from print publications to digital media, and some examples of their work include abstracts and posters for scientific conferences, grant proposals, health education materials, science textbooks, continuing education materials for health care professionals, sales training materials for pharmaceutical or medical device representatives, and regulatory documents for submission to health agencies.

As the leading professional organization for medical communicators in the United States and worldwide with a membership of nearly 5,000, the American Medical Writers Association (AMWA) is well-situated to tap into their member network to better understand the diverse backgrounds and experience of medical communicators. One valuable information source is the Medical Communication Compensation Survey conducted periodically by AMWA. This survey provides dependable salary information upon which employers and employees in the field of medical communication can base their salary negotiations. In addition to details about compensation, the survey also collects a wealth of demographic data from respondents, including age, gender, education, and work experience. In the following pages, AMWA presents the demographic data received from the survey to create a snapshot of the medical writing community.

METHODS

AMWA has been conducting periodic compensation surveys since 1989, and the most recent survey was deployed

to medical writers and editors during the first quarter of 2019. The purpose of the survey was to determine prevailing annual income and fee levels and to study different factors affecting pay (eg, years of experience, education, certification, employer type, type of work, and position level), based on the results of previous surveys. A Web-based survey was emailed to 7,456 individuals (3,835 AMWA members and 3,621 nonmembers). Nonmembers included lapsed AMWA members as well as individuals who were never AMWA members. Among those, 271 people requested to be removed from the survey panel and 55 emails were

returned, bringing the revised total number of respondents to 7,130. The survey included a question about whether people had worked for pay as a medical communicator during 2018 so that individuals who did not work in the field within the time window of interest could be excluded.

RESULTS

Overall, 1,418 individuals completed the survey, yielding a response rate of 20% and showing an increase in participation from the 2 previous surveys deployed in 2011 and 2015 (Table 1). More than four-fifths of respondents (81.3%)

Table 1. Demographics at a Glance for All Respondents, 2007–2019

	All Respondents' Demographics: 2007-2019			
	2007	2011	2015	2019
Number of Respondents				
All Respondents	1704	1193	1292	1418
Employee	1183	819	841	938
Freelance	521	374	451	480
Employee/Freelance	--	--	104	109
Gender				
Female	83%	84%	85%	83%
Male	17%	16%	15%	16%
Prefer not to answer	--	--	--	1%
Age (mean)				
All Employee	44	45	45	46
Freelance Only	48	50	50	52
% Years of Medical Writing Experience				
<2	14%	11%	8%	7%
2-5	20%	20%	25%	26%
6-10	28%	25%	25%	19%
>10	38%	43%	42%	49%
Years of Medical Writing Experience (mean)				
All Employee	9	11	11	11
Freelance Only	13	15	17	15
% Highest Level of Education				
Bachelor's	36%	28%	21%	21%
Master's	34%	34%	32%	32%
Advanced Degree	30%	38%	40%	46%
% Field of Highest Degree				
Science includes biology, medical technology, health sciences, and nutrition	40%	44%	50%	47%
English	--	--	9%	9%
Medicine	4%	4%	5%	5%
Pharmacy	5%	5%	4%	5%
Journalism	5%	5%	4%	4%
Communications	4%	4%	4%	3%
Liberal Arts	11%	11%	4%	3%
Medical Writing	--	--	4%	2%

reported that they were AMWA members. About two-thirds (66.1%) of the respondents were employed by a company, similar to the 2015 survey (65.1%), whereas the remaining one-third were freelancers (Table 2). When asked to describe their employer, 19.4% of all employee respondents indicated they had worked for a pharmaceutical company, 14.4% had worked for a medical communication company, and 13.8% had worked for a clinical or contract research organization. Most employee respondents indicated that the main area in which they had worked was regulatory writing (40.8%) or scientific publication (24.8%).

Table 2. Type of Employment, 2015 and 2019

	Survey Participants: 2015 & 2019			
	2019		2015	
Employees	938	66.1%	841	65.1%
Freelance	480	33.9%	451	34.9%
Freelance Employees	109	11.6%	104	13.8%

Most respondents were female (83.4%) (Table 1). The average age of all respondents was about 48 years. The average age for employees was 46 years, whereas for freelancers it was 52 years. More than half of respondents were 45 years or older, and only 12.6% were younger than 35 years (Figure 1).

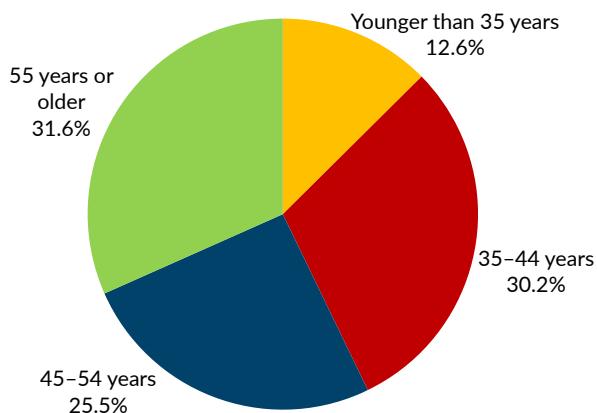


Figure 1. Age of all respondents, 2019. n= 1,394. Source: AMWA 2019 Compensation Survey.

The average time spent working for pay as a medical communicator for all respondents was 12 years. Nearly half (48.9%) of all respondents had greater than 10 years of experience as a paid medical communicator (Figure 2), with an average of 12.4 years. Employees averaged 10.9 years of experience, whereas freelancers averaged 15.4 years.

Most respondents held a doctoral-level degree (46%), such as a PhD, MD, or PharmD, or a master's degree (32%)

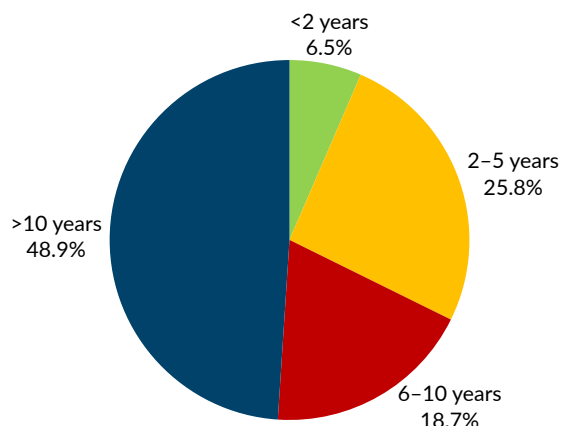


Figure 2. Years of experience as a medical communicator for all respondents, 2019. n= 1,414. Source: AMWA 2019 Compensation Survey.

as their highest level of education (Figure 3). These percentages were similar between employees and freelancers. Nearly half of all respondents had their highest degree in the field of science (47.2%), which included biology, chemistry, medical technology, health sciences, and nutrition, whereas 9% had their highest degree in English; these proportions were similar to those observed in the 2015 survey. Employees (50.4%) more often had their highest degree in science than freelancers (41 %) (Table 3 on next page).

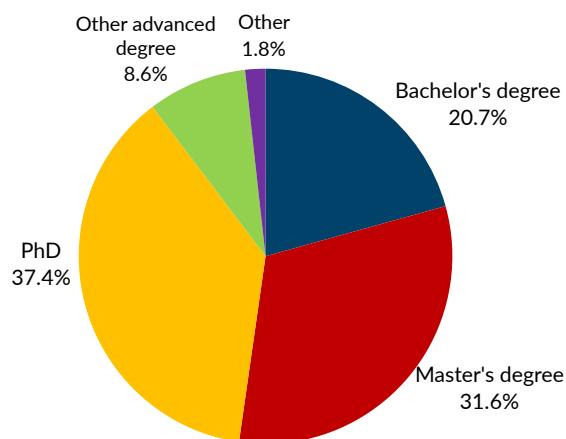


Figure 3. Highest level of education for all respondents, 2019. n= 1,415. Source: AMWA 2019 Compensation Survey.

Overall, about one-fifth of respondents (22.6%) held the AMWA Essential Skills certificate. Among all respondents, the certificate was held for an average of 8.6 years. Freelance respondents (10.4 years) held the certificate longer on average than employees (7.6 years). When asked about certifications, 41.1% of respondents reported they held the Editor in the Life Sciences (ELS) certification, 17.2% held the Certified Medical Publication Professional certification, 11.7% held the Medical Writer Certified

certification, and one-third of respondents held other certifications (Figure 4). The ELS was held most often by those having a bachelor's degree as their highest degree (51.5%).

More than two-fifths of respondents (44.1%) had worked in regulatory writing in the pharmaceutical, biotechnology, or device industry during their career. Of those who worked in regulatory writing, 77.7% had written clinical

study reports (CSRs), 74.4% had written study protocols, 64.7% had written investigator brochures, 63.5% had written regulatory responses or briefing documents, and 60.0% had written summary documents for supplemental drug submissions during their career (Figure 5). On average, a medical communicator who had worked in regulatory writing had written 32.8 nonclinical/discovery and chemistry, manufacturing, and controls (CMC) documents, 28.3 CSRs,

and 28.3 study protocols during their career. On average, freelance respondents had written more CSRs, study protocols, investigator brochures, and summary documents for drug submissions in their careers than their employee counterparts, whereas employees had written more nonclinical/discovery and CMC documents and aggregate reports than freelance respondents.

CONCLUSIONS

One key takeaway from AMWA's Medical Communication Compensation Survey is that medical communicators are a highly educated group of professionals, with nearly half of respondents reporting that they have an advanced degree. The high level of education among AMWA members and other medical communicators indicates a commitment to continuous learning. A new content strategy plan was developed following the 2019 survey with goals that included aligning AMWA's educational offerings with the needs of the membership and fulfilling AMWA's mission. In developing the content strategy, AMWA relied on data from the compensation survey, other surveys of the membership, and other data sources. One critical data source is the demographic information collected through AMWA member profiles, such as gender, race, highest level of education, primary workplace, and areas of professional focus. These online profiles may be accessed by members

Table 3. Field of Highest Degree, 2019

	All Respondents Fields of Highest Degree: 2019		
	All Respondents (1,418)	Employee (938)	Freelance (480)
Business	2.2%	2.0%	2.5%
Communication	3.0%	3.2%	2.5%
Education	1.2%	1.2%	1.3%
English	9.0%	9.6%	7.9%
Health care administration	0.5%	0.6%	0.2%
Journalism	3.5%	3.4%	3.8%
Liberal arts	2.9%	3.0%	2.7%
Medical writing	2.1%	1.9%	2.5%
Medicine	5.3%	3.8%	8.1%
Nursing	1.6%	1.0%	2.7%
Pharmacy	5.3%	4.4%	7.1%
Public health	3.5%	3.6%	3.1%
Science <small>Includes biology, chemistry, health science, medical technology, and nutrition</small>	47.2%	50.4%	41.0%
Technical writing	1.8%	1.5%	2.3%
Other	11.0%	10.3%	12.3%

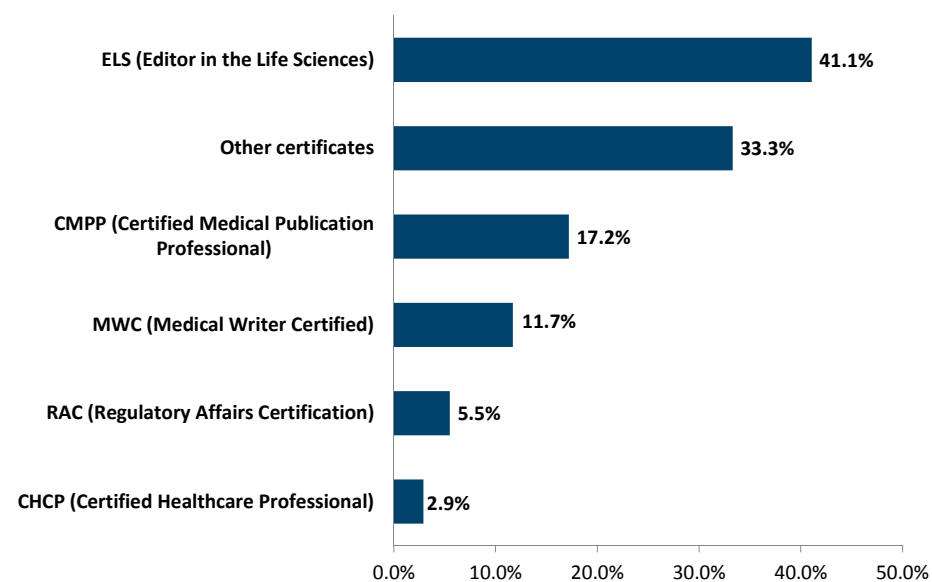


Figure 4. Certifications for all respondents, 2019. n= 384. Source: AMWA 2019 Compensation Survey.

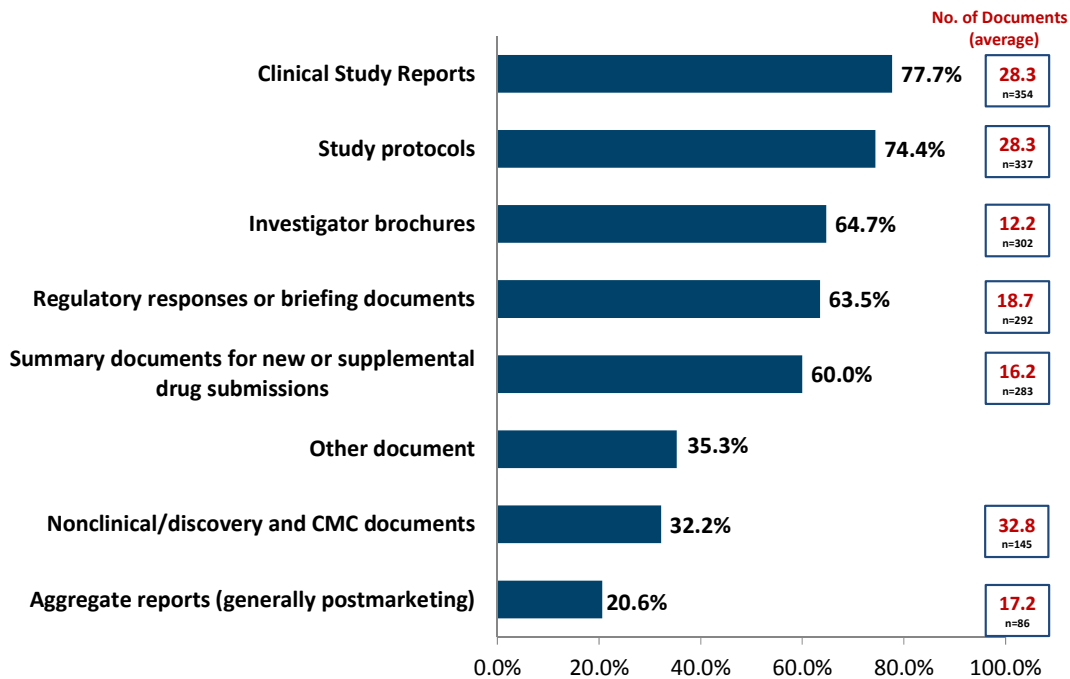


Figure 5. Documents authored during career for all respondents who had worked in regulatory writing, 2019 (check all that apply). n= 583. CMC=chemistry, manufacturing, and controls. Source: AMWA 2019 Compensation Survey.

at any time by logging into the AMWA website. By keeping member profiles up to date, members can support AMWA's mission of promoting excellence in medical communication and providing educational resources in support of that goal.

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Keep your AMWA Member Profile up to date. Help us understand more about you!

What best describes your role as a medical writer?

How would you describe your primary workplace/client?

What is your primary professional area of focus?

What are your additional professional areas of focus?

What is your primary responsibility in your work?

What is the highest level of education completed?

What credentials or degrees do you have?

Where do you live (city, state, country)?

Which gender do you identify with?

What is your race/ethnicity?

What is your year of birth?

Log into www.amwa.org and update your profile today.