

## FROM THE PRESIDENT

# Spring Forward



**Gail V. Flores, PhD** / 2020–2021 AMWA President

**A**s I write this article, we are 1 month into spring. This season is traditionally known as a time of regrowth and renewal, when the flowers start to bloom and the birds begin to chirp—and baby animals enter the world, perhaps with some hesitation, yet also with optimism. This spring in the United States, many of us are feeling a parallel with the season, as to a certain degree, we are emerging from the COVID-19 pandemic with both hesitation and optimism. However, we are not returning to the pre-2020 world; rather, we are learning to adapt as we create our new normal.

I wish we had a crystal ball to show us what the world will look like in October. Because we don't, AMWA leadership recently made the call to hold the 2021 AMWA Medical Writing & Communication Conference virtually. This decision was driven by data, both from public health experts and from our members. The results of a recent member survey indicated that an overwhelming percentage of members would be unable or unwilling to travel in October, for reasons ranging from employer restrictions to personal issues to uncertainty about how the pandemic will continue to unfold. Now that the decision had been made, we can shift our focus from concern about the ability to put on a safe, excellent, in-person conference to implementation of an amazing virtual event.

The first month of spring was quite busy for AMWA! In mid-March, the US House of Representatives passed the Protecting the Right to Organize Act, legislation that would negatively affect the livelihood of freelance medical communicators. We quickly issued a press release stating that AMWA strongly opposes this act, reaffirming our position from 2020 regarding such legislation. Special thanks to Lori De Milto for reaching out to us directly and providing critical information and sources to help shape our response.

Less than 2 weeks later, an article criticizing current oncologic clinical trial design was published in *JAMA Oncology*; among several arguments, a negative, if not insulting, light was cast on the role and intent of medical writers in the manuscript development process. Swiftly, AMWA engaged with the European Medical Writers Association (EMWA) and International Society for Medical Publication Professionals (ISMPP) to submit a letter to the Editor of *JAMA Oncology*

contesting the authors' remarks about medical writers, refuting the statement that medical writers introduce "spin" (studies have been conducted and no such evidence exists) and noting that medical writer involvement actually improves compliance with reporting guidelines and provides more complete reporting of trial results, a greater rate of publication over time, and a lower risk of publication retraction due to misconduct. I would like to thank my AMWA Board of Directors colleagues R. Michelle Sauer Gehring and Brian Bass for their support in information gathering, resource provision, and generating many emails and calls regarding this matter. I am also very thankful to my co-authors and collaborators on the letter, Thomas M. Schindler and Jacqueline M. Marchington.

In addition to reacting to these 2 emergencies, AMWA also has much to celebrate this spring! On March 22, we announced that Michael G. Baker, PhD, has been named Editor-in-Chief of *AMWA Journal*. He has hit the ground running, and we are all excited to watch the journal continue to evolve under his leadership. In addition, on April 1, our AMWA-EMWA-ISMPP joint position statement on medical publication, preprints, and peer review as well as a checklist were published in *Current Research and Medical Opinion*. Since publication, the statement has received positive press and feedback on social media.

A highlight of the AMWA year is recognition of those who excel in medical communication. Be sure to read the articles about the worthy recipients of the highest AMWA awards, the John P. McGovern, Walter C. Alvarez, and Harold Swanberg Awards, in this issue. It is such a joy to welcome Stacy L. Christiansen, Harriet A. Washington, and Lori L. Alexander to our circle of award recipients.

There is a saying that "Life isn't about waiting for the storm to pass; it's about learning to dance in the rain." As we emerge from our period of waiting for the storm to pass, I hope we can learn how to dance in the rain. In this new normal, let's continue to work hard, advocate for our profession, engage with each other, and lift each other up virtually, and put on the best virtual conference ever. Let's spring forward!

Yours in AMWA,  
Gail