

Guest Editor

Patti Wolf ELS

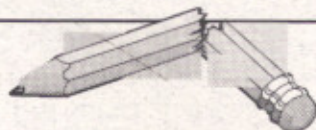
Contributors

Jonathan Briggs ELS
 Donna Carpenter ELS
 Shirley Peterson ELS
 Bobbie Reitt ELS(D)

Direct all newsletter correspondence to:

Grace Darling ELS(D)
 411 North Washington
 Suite 6900
 Dallas, Texas 75246
 214-824-0154
 214-824-0463 Fax
 darlingg@airmail.net

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New Bylaws for BELS

Bobbie Reitt ELS(D)



From the beginning, BELS has taken the pragmatic approach. If it worked, we kept doing it; if it didn't, we tried something else. Even when we were still a mere committee of author's editors in CBE, we knew that we were on to something very important for our profession. Realization that our failure could hurt the profession was daunting. We managed to keep going by steadfastly refusing to think about failing. We just kept our heads down and did the next, most pressing chore.

We've been giving official examinations since May 1991, and we've certified more than 250 editors in the life sciences. Our names with the designations "ELS" and "ELS(D)" are beginning to appear on title pages and credits. Occasional job listings say "BELS certification preferred." The resistance of colleagues who doubted or feared our validity is subsiding. We've actually done it! Board certification for life-sciences editors is a reality.

It's high time, then, that we got our administrative house in order. The revision of BELS bylaws is but the first step, and work is well under way. A committee of four—Margaret Hoppenrath, Karen Klein, Bobbie Reitt (chair), and Martha Tacker—is drafting a total revision of the bylaws. The existing bylaws, written from boilerplate in a lawyer's word processor to meet requirements for incorporation, have been honored more in the breach than in the observance. New bylaws will fix that.

The committee is trying to do two things as it deliberates. First, we want to capture in formal language the way we do things when we do them well. Second, we want to set up a good system where we have none now. An example of the former is the procedure for handling applications and registrations for both the certification and diplomate

examinations. An example of the latter is the haphazard way we publish BELS brochures, manuals, and tests. (Talk about the cobbler's children!)

The committee began by looking at parliamentary law about bylaws and charters. To our surprise, we learned that wholesale bylaws revision is easier than piecemeal revision. No elaborate comparisons of the old and the revised versions are required. New bylaws are approved by a simple majority. Fortunately, it's not an all-or-nothing deal: New bylaws can be approved as a whole, of course, but they can be approved article by article as well. That way, if one or two articles are objectionable to the majority of members, the remaining articles can be approved and go into effect immediately.

In early April all members will receive the complete draft of the new bylaws with a ballot. Members will be asked to approve or disapprove each of the 14 articles. The results of the voting will be announced at the annual meeting in Montreal in May.

Examples of the changes proposed in the new bylaws include

1. An Executive Council that no longer consists exclusively of diplomate members and that will see a regular turnover as new leaders are elected.
2. More BELS work being done by committees and less by lone, unassisted volunteers.
3. Financial planning, as we work from a formal budget presented annually to members.
4. More coordination of BELS publications under the direction of a single officer.

In short, the opportunities for more members to participate in BELS projects are expanding. We on the Bylaws Committee hope to draft a blueprint for a system that really works because it allows more people to contribute without undue hardship on any one person.

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New Bylaws...continued from page 1

Finally, it occurs to me as I write this that the new bylaws are giving us the best opportunity we've had in a long time to make clear to all members how BELS actually operates. We've had policies and procedures in place for years that are probably only dimly understood; now they will be clear to everyone.

The committee's work is hard (just ask any one of us!) but very satisfying. We're thinking about the future and what BELS can be and should be, and how we might get there. We're still in the drafting stages, so if you have suggestions for us, we'd like to hear from you. Call or fax me at (828) 526-9138, e-mail me at res@usaserve.net, or write to 560 Nall Farm Road, Highlands, NC 18741, USA.

WANTED

Diligent, energetic, and enthusiastic person to edit the *BELS Letter*. General duties include the collection and organization of appropriate material (some writing is inevitable) and overseeing the production and distribution of the newsletter. Currently the Editor is responsible for the copy, design, printing, mailing-list maintenance, and shipping of the publication; some of these tasks could be assumed by other people if volunteers are found.

To apply for the job, please write explaining why you think you would be good at it and address it to

Grace Darling ELS(D)
411 N Washington #6900
Dallas TX 75246
214-824-0463 fax
darlingg@airmail.net

If you are not interested in the editorship but believe you can contribute in other ways, please write too. All offers will be welcome. The pay is nil but the rewards are enormous.

Diplomate Program Streamlined*Shirley Peterson ELS*

The BELS Diplomate Program has been updated and streamlined. A new introductory brochure is available, and successful applicants to the program will receive a new Portfolio Guide.

Please recall that BELS members are eligible for the program 2 years after the certification examination. The 2-year wait is intended as a period during which editorial skills can be honed. Diplomate status indicates the attainment of editorial mastery, a level of skill beyond that tested by certification. Mastery is proved in two steps. First, when an applicant's assembled portfolio of edited material and other items passes the scrutiny of three diplomate examiners. Second, when the applicant passes the written diplomate examination, also scrutinized by three diplomates. Jubilation follows. Eighteen certified editors are now in various stages of pursuing a (D) to go after their ELS. Names of (D) candidates are, of course, confidential.

The introductory brochure is free. Application for admission to the program requires two letters attesting that the applicant has at least 6 years of experience as an editor. The fee for processing the application is \$25. The Portfolio Guide is sent when the applicant is admitted to the program. The complete portfolio and request for portfolio evaluation must be accompanied by a check for \$75. The written examination, offered only after the portfolio has been passed by the examiners, can be taken at the same times and places that certification examinations are offered and costs \$100.

Brochures and guides will be sent by snail mail. Requests for brochures should be addressed to BELS, PO Box 8133, Radnor, PA 19087-8133, fax 610-995-0835, petesm@op.net.

Are the long winter months stretching ahead boringly? Consider brightening the season and your future by applying for the Diplomate Program.

"A room without books is like a body without a soul."

*Cicero***Web Site Update***Patti Wolf ELS*

I've received lots of positive feedback about the BELS Web site, <http://www.bels.org>. Thank you all for your constructive comments.

I want to encourage all of you to consider placing an ad on the Web site. If you are a freelance, the BELS Web site is a great place to advertise your services for a nominal fee (\$20/year). Several members have already placed their ads; you can read about how to place an ad in the members-only area under "Advertise Yourself."

The ads will only work if potential employers use the site to search for freelances. Please encourage your clients, colleagues, and employers to use the *free* service provided by BELS for searching for BELS-certified freelances. You can search for a BELS-certified editor by clicking on "Search the Database" from the main page.

If you have not received a password to access the members-only area of the Web site, if you need to correct a directory entry, or if you have questions or feedback about the site, please contact me at webmaster@bels.org.

Welcome to all recent BELS members!

Fran Aitkens ELS
2023 Meadow Place
Victoria BC
CANADA V8R 1R2
(250)598-3723 V&F
aitkens@islandnet.com

Deborah J Anderson ELS
660 Kensington Ave
Severna Park MD 21146
(410)223-1631 V
(410)223-2620 F
danderso@jhspsh.edu

Elizabeth Jean Betsch ELS
2630 Skymark Ave
Mississauga ON
CANADA L2W 5A4
(905)629-0900 V
(905)629-0893 F

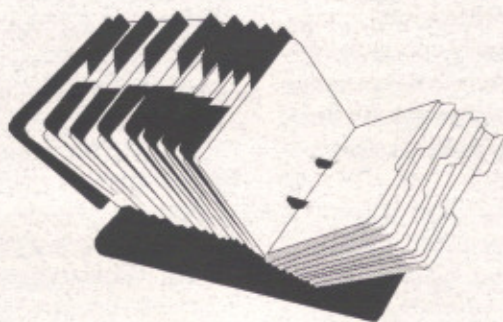
Ashley Birch ELS
Glenariff, Start Lane
Whaley Bridge
High Peak SK23 7BP
UNITED KINGDOM
44-1-625-517611 V
44-1-625-516563 F
ashley.a.u.birch@alderley.zeneca.com

Carolyn Brown ELS
5 Sims Ave
Ottawa ON
CANADA K1Y 3J9
(613)731-9331 V
(613)523-0937 F
brownc@cma.ca

James R Cozzarin ELS
7744 Fairlawn Ave
Mentor OH 44060
(216)595-7919 V
(216)595-9757 F
cozzarin-j@proedcom.com

Elaine Crabtree ELS
1624 N Lynhurst Dr #22
Indianapolis IN 46224
(317) 274-5190 V
(317) 274-4638 F
ecrabtre@iupui.edu

Kris Freeman ELS
833 NW 53rd St
Seattle WA 98107
(206)616-8536 V
(206)706-5465 F
kfreeman@u.washington.edu



Miriam Gitler ELS
NOVA Research Co
4600 East-West Hwy, Ste 700
Bethesda MD 20814-3415
(301)986-1891 V
(301)986-4931 F
mgitler@novaresearch.com

Cheryl R Hampson ELS
Agriculture & Agri-Food Canada
RR 4, Site 99, Comp 31
Summerland BC
CANADA V0H 1Z0
(250)494-7711 V
(250)494-0755 F
hampsonc@em.agr.ca

Mark Helliwell ELS
10 Rugby Dr
Macclesfield
Cheshire SK10 2JD
UNITED KINGDOM
44-1-625-515225 V
44-1-625-516563 F
mark.helliwell@alderley.zeneca.com

Bettie Jean Hessie ELS
10500 Rockville Pike #1114
Rockville MD 20852-3347
(301)493-9347 V

Stephen Kepple ELS
5808 Vandegrift Ave
Rockville MD 20851
(301)657-3000 x1335 V
(301)657-1258 F
skepple@ashp.org

Linda A Loy ELS
601 W Windsor Ave
Alexandria VA 22302
(202)682-6019 V
lloy@psych.org

Jennifer Macke ELS
Biomed Writing Ed Serv
119 Riverpoint Dr
Yorktown VA 23693
(757)868-0175 V
(757)868-0322 F
jmacke@mindspring.com

Eleanor Mayfield ELS
10227 Green Holly Terr
Silver Spring MD 20902
(301)681-8977 V
(301)681-0185 F
elmayfield@radix.net

Nancy McGuire ELS
1050 George St #4J
New Brunswick NJ 08901
(732)321-4395 V
(732)321-4392 F
nmcguire@concentric.net

Heather Miniman ELS
17 Briarwood Dr #1
Attleboro MA 02703
(617)732-7708 V
(617)739-3685 F
hminiman@dsg.harvard.edu

Paula I Robbins ELS
43 Vermont Ct A-3
Asheville NC 28806
(704)355-3185 V
(704)355-6041 F
probbins@carolinas.org

Caroline J Simmons ELS
4301 W Markham, Slot 752
Little Rock AR 72205
(501)686-6004 V
(501)686-7861 F
simmons-carolinej@exchange.uams.edu

Christine M Sophos ELS
7821 45th Ave SW
Seattle WA 98136-2217
(206)674-1915 V

Mary L Tod ELS
8 American Ct
Baltimore MD 21228
(410)744-9349 V
(410)744-0846 F

Gregory Truitt ELS
Zeneca Pharmaceuticals
1800 Concord Pike, FOC 1CW
Shingley-2
Wilmington DE 19850-5437
(302)886-7519 V
(302)886-5300 F
gregg.truitt@phwilm.zeneca.com

Nancy S Wachter ELS
Lippincott Williams & Wilkins
19509 Cameron Mill Rd
Parkton MD 21120
(410)528-4315 V
(410)528-4187 F
nwachter@wwilkins.com

Erin L Walls ELS
3480 Muirfield Way
Carmel IN 46032
(317)277-5644 V&F
walls_erin_j@lilly.com

Ann L Wandtke ELS
436 E Redbud Alley
Columbus OH 43206
(614)447-3600 x2872 V
(614)449-9811 F
alw00@cas.org

Jane Weaver ELS
6747 Springhouse Ln
Marshall VA 20115-2303
(540)364-1030 V
(202)682-6016 F
weaudav@citizen.infi.net

Eve J Wilson ELS
12306 Quintette Ln
Bowie MD 20720
(410)715-9996 x171 V
(410)715-9997 F
ewilson@medicalliance.com

Tracy D Wrey ELS
5809 1st Ave NW
Seattle WA 98107
(206)784-9597 V
twrey@scientifica.net

Newsbits

Flo Witte ELS became director of the Scientific Editing Department at St Jude Children's Research Hospital in Memphis on 5 October 1998. Flo came from Lexington, Kentucky, where she worked as director of the Publications Office for the Department of Surgery at the University of Kentucky for nearly 8 years and as research coordinator for the Kentucky Spine Institute for just over a year.

At AMWA's national conference this last fall, Flo was installed as administrator of publications for 1999. She has general responsibility for the *AMWA Journal*, the Web site, the *Freelance Directory*, and all other AMWA publications. As the publications administrator, she is also now a voting member of the Executive Committee. In addition, Flo was named a Fellow of the American Medical Writers Association at the annual conference. Congratulations, Flo!

Chris Wogan ELS changed jobs in September 1998 and is now a scientific editor in the Department of Scientific Publications at The University of Texas M D Anderson Cancer Center. Chris also wrote an article on what space medicine writers do that was published in the September 1998 issue of the *AMWA Journal*.

Barbara Simmons ELS has a new position. She's senior managing editor at Association Management Center in Glenview, Illinois, where she's responsible for the publications of the National Association for Healthcare Quality as well as overseeing the editorial staff in the Communications Department.

Julliana Newman ELS won the 1998 Award of Excellence for scholarly publications from the Arkansas Chapter of the Society for Technical Communication (STC) for her article titled "Advances in Lithotripsy and Stone Disease Treatment," which appeared in the July/August 1996 issue of *Radiologic Technology*, the official journal of the American Society of Radiologic Technologists. She also won the 1998 Award of Excellence for scholarly publications from the Phoenix Chapter of STC for her article on medical imaging of facial and mandibular fractures, which appeared in the May/June 1998 issue of *Radiologic Technology*. Recently she won an Award of Excellence for the technical report that she produced, "The Wyeth-Ayerst Prescription Drug Benefit Cost and Plan Design Survey Report; 1998 Edition" in the annual technical publications competition sponsored by the Houston Chapter of STC. In 1997 Julie won AMWA's Rose Kushner Award for writing achievement in the field of breast cancer.

Additionally, Julie has been appointed assistant clinical professor in the Department of Continuing Pharmacy Education at the College of Pharmacy, University of New Mexico. She is

responsible for coordinating the continuing education program for pharmacy at UNM and represents the College of Pharmacy on the Continuing Medical Education Advisory Board. She was also named managing editor for the University of New Mexico's correspondence continuing education courses for nuclear pharmacists and nuclear professionals.

Julliana is publisher and president of Wellman Publishing Inc based in Albuquerque. She has been in business since 1995. Wellman specializes in the production of high-quality continuing education materials for healthcare professionals (physicians, pharmacists, nurses, radiologic technologists, and health benefit managers) and patients.

Ann Tamariz ELS is managing editor of a new international medical journal, *Neuro-Oncology*, which will begin publication in January 1999 and will be published quarterly on the Internet, with a print version to follow. The journal's Web site, <http://neuro-oncology.mc.duke.edu>, will be open to the public initially but will later be restricted to members of the Society for Neuro-Oncology and other subscribers.

BJ Hessie ELS retired from NIH on 3 January 1999 after 42 years of federal service. For the last 13 years, BJ has worked as a technical publications editor in medical sciences in the Office of the Clinical Director, Clinical Neurosciences Program, National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke. For many years before that she worked as an editor of books and journal articles on clinical and basic epilepsy research.

BJ looks forward to reading for pleasure once again (reading and editing medical research reports all day on the computer screen makes the eyes "scream" for relief), pursuing her interests in genealogy, art history, and other subjects, and traveling a bit. Of course, some appreciative authors will continue to want her help, so she plans to work on the occasional writing-editing project, be it a book, journal article, or supplement. After 1 December 1998 her NIH e-mail address should not be used.

Donna Carpenter ELS has a new job. At the time she earned her BELS certification, she was editing nursing journals for SLACK Inc, but she is now publisher of the Drug Information Unit for Springhouse Corporation. And... if BELS members happen upon any Springhouse drug titles, they will see ELS proudly displayed behind her name on the staff page. Donna says she's asked about the meaning of "BELS" regularly and tries to spread greater awareness of the organization in the healthcare community. Keep up the good PR, Donna!

Kendall Sterling ELS published the novella "Chrysalis" in May 1998 as part of an annual science fiction anthology. She also published two science fiction short stories in May 1997, one of which was nominated for an award.

Think not that thy word and thine alone must be right. *Sophocles, Antigone, 706.*

Book Reviews

With the increasing use of herbal remedies by the general population, Springhouse has published one of the first authoritative references for healthcare professionals. ***The Professional's Handbook of Complementary & Alternative Medicines*** provides detailed monographs on nearly 300 of the most commonly used herbal agents. Each monograph includes generic names, synonyms, common trade names, common forms, source, chemical components, actions, reported uses, dosage, adverse reactions, interactions, contraindications and precautions, special considerations, analysis, and references. The analysis lets the reader know exactly where each agent stands from a scientific point of view.

Appendixes offer valuable supplemental information, including selected herbal agents with limited clinical data, herbal agents listed as unsafe by the FDA, potentially unsafe plants, herbal agents to avoid during pregnancy, and potential drug-herbal agent interactions.

The Professional's Handbook of Complementary & Alternative Medicines was written by Charles W Fetrow PharmD, of St Francis Medical Center in Pittsburgh, and Juan R Avila PharmD, of Shenandoah University in Winchester, Virginia. The foreword was contributed by Simeon Margolis MD PhD of Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine.

The book is available from Springhouse Corporation for \$39.95 by calling 1-800-666-5597 or visiting its Web site at <http://www.springnet.com>. It is also available in medical and general bookstores.

Donna Carpenter ELS



SI Units for Clinical Measurement. Donald S Young and Edward J Huth with Additional Contributors. American College of Physicians, Philadelphia, 1999. 331 pp, \$36.00.

As most biomedical editors know, all American Medical Association journals, many others in the United States, and most published outside the United States require authors to use SI units or both traditional units and SI units. We also know most hospitals do not use SI units in their daily health care. Young and Huth's book provides some interesting background on why US hospitals and other medical institutions do not use SI units and also supplies authors and editors extensive and valuable reference material on the proper use of these units.

Chapter 1, "The Metric System and Its Development into the International System of Units (le Systeme International d'Unites; SI)," briefly reviews the history of the development of the metric system and gives some indication of why the United States has yet to adopt SI units for medicine. Here we learn that the two fundamental concepts of the metric system, the base units and their division into decimal units, have been recognized for more than 400 hundred years. Various systems of measurement based on these concepts have been developed

Tom Lang's long-awaited book, ***How to Report Statistics in Medicine: Annotated Guidelines for Authors, Editors, and Reviewers***, coauthored with Michelle Secic, was published in 1997. Tom's statistics workshop is one of the most popular ones offered at the AMWA annual conference because of his ability to make statistics understandable. Lang and Secic's book is written for "authors, editors, and reviewers who prepare or evaluate biomedical research articles for publication." The book is divided into four parts:

- Part 1: "Annotated Guidelines for Reporting Statistical Information," subdivided into 15 chapters that correspond to the 15 general applications of biostatistics—Designed to help nonstatisticians find the appropriate guideline.
- Part 2: "Guide to Statistical Terms and Tests"—Descriptions of statistical terms and concepts in the context of medical research.
- Part 3: "An Unannotated, Reference List of Guidelines"—Primarily used as a reference tool for readers already familiar with statistical concepts.
- Part 4: "Appendixes," including "Checklists for Reporting Clinical Trials," "Mathematical Symbols and Notation," "Rules for Presenting Numbers in Text," and "Spelling of Statistical Terms and Tests"—For assistance in reporting statistics.

The book also contains a bibliography and an index.

How to Report Statistics in Medicine won an Honorable Mention award in the Allied Health category of the 1998 AMWA Medical Book Awards. The 368-page softcover book is published by the American College of Physicians and sells for \$39.95.

Patti Wolf MS ELS



and revised during that time. The SI system is the most recent of these progeny, the most comprehensive in terms of the number of different units it encompasses, and the most widely used among most major countries. Despite the fact that the United States was one of the original signatories to the Metric Convention established by France in 1875, and despite the passage of the Metric Conversion Act by the US Congress in 1975, we are still reluctant to use the system, especially within our own borders. Chapter 1 goes on to describe the role of various organizations and institutions interested in SI units and what they have done to help or hinder their adoption. Enter medical journals and their important role in the widespread use of SI units. Thus, the reason that anyone who writes for, edits, or reads these journals should be at least familiar with SI units is simple: It's how the rest of the world does it.

Chapter 2, "SI Units, Base and Derived; Additional Accepted Units, and Style Rules," provides information essential for authors and editors of biomedical manuscripts. After explaining where the units and their derivatives come from, this chapter explains how to present these units in writing.

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A valuable bonus is a table of style specifications that includes examples of incorrect styles to help reduce any doubt as to what the proper abbreviations and nomenclature are for the units themselves, prefixes, combinations, and their presentation with numbers and values. For example, the table shows us that the correct abbreviations for kilogram and kilograms are not "Kg" and "kgs," but always simply "kg."

Chapter 3, "SI units for Medical Practice," is very brief, explaining proper use in the specialties and subspecialties; how SI measures of mass, height, and length common to nearly all medical specialties relate to our current system of units; and how SI units should be rounded and recorded. This chapter also mentions the need for consistency when abbreviating laboratory values and the difficulty of doing so because a uniform set of abbreviations has not been agreed upon.

Chapter 4, "Special Units: Older Metric Units, SI Units, Conversion Factors, and Values in Healthy Persons," provides information on specialized units used in several medical specialties and laboratory tests. The chapter contains the following tables, at least one of which I'm sure any medical writer or editor will find of use:

- Audiology: Quantities Measured and Appropriate Use
- Cardiovascular Measurements: Symbols, Older Metric Units, and SI Units
- Quantities in Cardiovascular Medicine
- Abbreviations for Analyzed Fluids and Other Materials
- Renal Clearances: Unit Conversion Factors and Reference Values
- Conversion of pH to Hydrogen Ion Concentration
- Terms and Modifiers in Pulmonary Medicine: Abbreviations, Definitions, Symbols, and Comments
- Units of Measurement in Pulmonary Medicine and Respiratory Physiology
- Quantities in Pulmonary Medicine
- Quantities in Pulmonary Hemodynamics
- Older Radiation Units and the Relevant SI Units
- Radionuclide Applications: Some Typical Activities
- Typical Absorbed Doses
- Conversion of Older Units to SI Units of Appropriate Range

Chapter 5, "Introducing SI Units to the Hospital," is a concise and down-to-earth discussion of how to switch from traditional units to SI units. Author Mathew McQueen explains what the steps are and who is responsible for them and gives detailed recommendations and schedules.

As informative and useful as the five chapters of this book are, they are supplemented by three just as valuable appendixes, which also comprise the bulk of the book's 331 pages. The first two appendixes are meant to be used together. Any editor who has wondered which of the three variants of a chemical name should be used in a manuscript now can find the answer quickly—and has a source to refer to when the author disagrees. Appendix 1 lists "Chemical Analytes and Hematologic Measurements: Units, Conversion Factors, Significant Digits, and Suggested Increments." Appendix 2 is an "Index of Synonyms for Analytes and Cross-References to the Entry Terms (Quantity) of Appendix 1." Thus, when an author gives a value for 3-hydroxytyramine, we can first go to Appendix 2 and see that there are three forms of dopamine that this term may refer to (dopamine; dopamine, conjugated; and, dopamine, free). Appendix 1 then shows us under "dopamine" the three forms, which fluids each form is measured in (serum, plasma, or urine), the values in healthy persons in traditional units, a conversion factor, values in healthy persons in SI units, the number of significant digits, and the suggested minimum increment of measure. The authors warn that the values given in Appendix 1 are only representative and should not be used to interpret test values in patients. They also warn they are not attempting to "describe a preferred manner of reporting." However, with the information provided in these appendixes, authors and editors can present clinical measurements consistently.

Appendix 3 lists "Amounts of Administered Constituent in One Liter of Solution" for numerous common substances such as albumin, lactated Ringer's solution, and dextrose. The solution name, constituent substance, mass amount, and molar amounts are given.

This book will be a valuable reference for anyone who has to prepare materials that include clinical information in SI units.

Jonathan Briggs ELS

A perfectly healthy sentence is extremely rare. *Henry David Thoreau*

BELS Members Get Together at AMWA

BELS members got together for breakfast on October 29 and 31 during the AMWA annual conference in Vancouver. The first breakfast was attended by about 25 members, and the second by about a dozen. Both sessions were kept informal intentionally: no agenda, no speaker, a welcome by the BELS president—and that was it. The food was good, and the company and conversation were, of course, intelligent. The sessions constituted a pleasant diversion from the sometimes more serious business of the AMWA annual conference, and we certainly hope to make them an annual feature. Those who were able to attend owe their gratitude to Janice Jerrells ELS, who arranged both sessions single-handedly.

1998 NASW meeting

Shirley Peterson ELS

The National Association of Science Writers (NASW) meets in conjunction with the annual AAAS meeting. The two membership levels of NASW are about to be abolished, but they were still evident at this meeting. Active Members are engaged "in the preparation and interpretation of science news through all media normally devoted to informing the public." Associate members are editors of our ilk (who can provide evidence of writing for the general media), public relations people, and teachers of science-writing courses in colleges or journalism schools. Even without reading the rules of membership again, I'd have guessed that PR folk were second-class members. An episode of PR-bashing was quickly followed by apologies and acknowledgment that many leads come from press releases.

The plenary session addressed the ethical problems inherent in writing about science and the possibility of formulating a code of ethics for science writers. Legal and medical codes speak to behavior and clients, but there is a fundamental difference between serving clients and serving the citizenry. The only extant code of ethics that mentions responsibility to society is that of social service workers. Science reporters and writers feel a somewhat similar responsibility to the public. The major ethical concern of the journalists present was their own possible conflict of interests. For some, the solution may be to disclose a conflict before someone else exposes it. In this context were mentioned the disclosure rules of science journals and federal regulations (not cited specifically) that apply as if the perception of conflict of interest were the same as factual conflict. Concerns about conflict of interest at one remove have prompted interviewers to ask a scientist, at the end of an interview, if he or she has any conflicts that would be reported when the scientist submits a manuscript for journal publication.

The point was made that any crusade involves conflicts of interest, as do grants from any source, travel fellowships, guest speaker fees, and freelance work for an influential group or foundation. National Public Radio, for example, sometimes applies for a grant to research stories in the area of the granting agency's interest. Carl Sagan's definition of common sense (in the book *Billions and Billions*) was greeted with a sigh of recognition and relief. Honest common sense seems to be the answer in situations that are not clear-cut.

'Tis pleasant, sure, to see one's name in print;

A book's a book, although there's nothing in 't.

Lord Byron, *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*



The other session I attended was "Reporting on cloning: should there ever be another ewe?" After some preliminary business about the cloned ewe story, this turned into a lively discussion of cloning humans and organs thereof. Joe Palca of NPR, one of the recipients of this year's radio science journalism award (for a series on how the brain works), was praised several times for his masterful interview of Dr Seed, the physical scientist who announced he was planning to clone humans. A panel member described the difficulty of deciding whether to do the interview at all—Seed had proposed wild schemes before—but the topic was so controversial that it couldn't be ignored. Someone in the audience contributed the information that one of Seed's earlier announcements (which had been ignored by responsible journalists) was his intention to establish an institution in the American Midwest where a large number of young women from the Indian subcontinent would be housed and cared for while they served as surrogate mothers/incubators for in vitro-conceived embryos. Presumably the system would be funded by those who could not, or chose not to, endure gestation themselves.

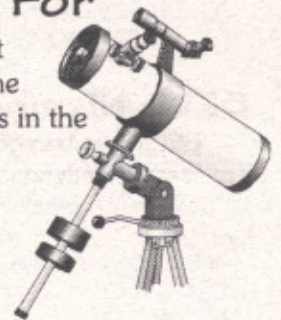
The sense of the panel was that human cloning would happen eventually because of ego and income. Technology is getting close to cloning dogs and horses (imagine the financial upheaval if racehorses were cloned).

The panel member who is a member of the President's Bio-ethics Commission (Alta Charo, an MD, a lawyer, and a professor, too) said that a threshold of accomplishment must be crossed before it is possible to make ethical and legal decisions relative to cloning research. Further discussion included cloning individual organs or other replacement parts (more widely desirable and probably more difficult than producing a whole baby, but preliminary research would be halted by laws against "cloning"), cleaning up genetic load at the several-cell stage (insert good genes early), and in vitro studies of human embryos.

Dr Charo said that after one bio-ethics commission meeting, there were picketers outside the building, marching around in fuzzy sheep-suits and chanting, "Cloning is baaaaaad!"

Look For

Members should expect to receive a ballot for the 1999 election of officers in the next few weeks.



URLs 4 U

International Trademark Association. Check here for spelling, capitalization, and hyphenation of more than 4000 trade and service marks.

<http://plaza.interport.net/inta/tmchklst.htm>

Members of the M*N Crew have served as active developers on a variety of projects in the fields of Medicine and Science. Their goal is to apply cutting-edge Internet technology to both fields, an intersection that they term Internet Medicine.

<http://www.medsitenavigator.com/>

Howard Hughes Medical Institute

<http://www.hhmi.org/>

CenterWatch's JobWatch—career opportunities in medical writing

<http://www.centerwatch.com/jwads7.htm>

Reviews of medical writing guides

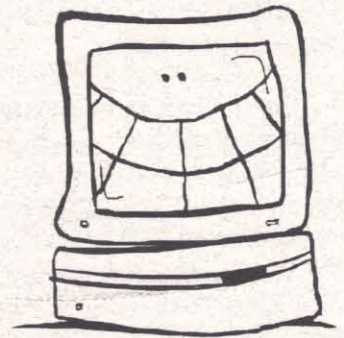
<http://www.sciencekomm.at/books/writing/writem.html>

The Canadian Medical Society—English version

<http://www.cma.ca/eng-index.htm>

Copy Editor newsletter

<http://www.copyeditor.com/copyedithome.html>



With just enough of learning to misquote.

Lord Byron, English Bards and Scotch Reviewers

Calendar

- 22 May BELS Eighth Annual Meeting, Montreal, Canada
- 22-25 May CBE 42nd Annual Meeting, Montreal, Canada
- 27-30 October AMWA 59th Annual Conference, Philadelphia, PA

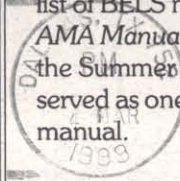
BELS Test Sites

- 13 March San Francisco (Asilomar meeting)
- 21 May Montreal (CBE Annual Meeting)
- 26 October Philadelphia (AMWA Annual Conference)



Correction

Judith Dickson ELS(D) was omitted from the list of BELS members who contributed to the new *AMA Manual of Style*. The list was published in the Summer 1998 issue of the *BELS Letter*. Judy served as one of the manuscript reviewers for the manual.



BELS Letter

411 N Washington, Suite 6900
Dallas, TX 75246

