

Health and Medical Writing: No Science Degree Required

Session S20

Saturday, May 21, 2016. 3:45 p.m. – 5:15 p.m.



Jane Langille, ASJA, @janelangille

Health & medical writer, journalist, content creator.

Web: janelangille.com

Marijke Vroomen Durning, RN, ASJA, @marijke

Experienced health content specialist.

Web: Medhealthwriter.com

Maureen Salamon, ASJA, @maureensalamon

Health/lifestyle writer, content creator, ghostwriter.

LinkedIn: [Maureen Salamon](https://www.linkedin.com/in/maureen-salamon)

Moderator: Patchen Barss, ASJA, @patchenbarss

Communicator, journalist, author.

Web: Patchenbarss.com

There are plenty of markets for health and medical writing:

- Healthcare associations and organizations
- Hospitals, healthcare systems
- Healthcare companies and brands
- Mainstream media outlets: magazines, newspapers
- Professional trade magazines
- Ghostwriting for doctors and healthcare professionals

Different Types of Health Communications: Journalism, Custom Content and Ghostwriting:

- Feature stories - print and online
- Op/eds
- Blog posts
- Website content
- News stories
- Newsletters
- White papers
- Annual reports
- Brochures
- Books

Top Qualities for Success:

- Crack research skills – know where to find the right information and how to interpret studies
- Finding sources – develop a good network and use it
- Curiosity
- Ability to synthesize complex information and make it understandable for the audience
- Accuracy – more responsibility than other fields
- Healthy skepticism: Don't write click bait!
- Deft interviewing skills to tease out complex information from sources

Top Resources for Evidence-Based Health Information:

- [PubMed](http://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/) – 26 million citations for biomedical literature from MedLine, life science journals, online books

- [National Institutes of Health](#) (NIH)
- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) (CDC)
- [MedLine Plus](#) (NIH/National Library of Medicine site for patients and families)
- Universities with medical and nursing schools
- Google Scholar
- [Clinicaltrials.gov](#) – global registry and database of publicly and privately supported human clinical trials
- [Cochrane Collaboration](#) – UK-based global network, produces systematic reviews of health information free from conflicts of interest
- Reputable disease and condition organizations e.g. [American Cancer Society](#)
- Social Media: evidence-based news e.g. [Stat News](#), experts, journalists

Where to Find Story Sources:

- Doctors, researchers, scientists:
 - Top academic institutions like Harvard, Stanford, Yale
 - [HARO](#) (Help A Reporter Out)
 - Find the principal investigator’s email on clinical study
 - Professional organizations e.g. [American Medical Association](#)
 - Media stories – read other stories, who is talking
 - Custom content – communications managers provide sources
- Patients:
 - Healthcare organizations: e.g. [American Heart Association](#)
 - Facebook groups
 - Online communities and discussion forums

Help With Clinical Studies:

- [AHCJ Core Topic: Medical Studies](#) is a treasure trove of resources with guides to reporting, interpreting graphs, the peer review process, understanding bias and statistics, and media coverage.
 - Find links under “Guides to reporting” for *NIH Clinical Trials and You: Glossary of Common Trials* and *Covering Medical Research: A Guide for Reporting on Studies*
 - [Numbers and Statistics Glossaries](#) – cheat sheets from the Dartmouth Institute for Health Policy and Clinical Practice about common stats terms and what they mean
 - [HealthNewsReview](#) – grades health stories for quality of reporting and accuracy
 - [Retraction Watch](#) – reports on clinical studies retracted for plagiarism, fraud, and other reasons
- Access full studies behind pay walls through association memberships, media contacts at universities, paper authors directly, or library privileges at universities and colleges.

Professional Development and Networking Opportunities:

- [American Society of Journalists and Authors](#) (ASJA) – Annual and regional conferences, Client Connections
- [Association of Health Care Journalists](#) (AHCJ) – Resources and annual Health Journalism conference
- [National Association of Science Writers](#) (NASW) – some overlap with health writing
- Think outside the box – Attend events in your local area through [Eventbrite](#) listings, check out events calendars for local hospitals, health organizations and medical schools