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## Reports of Meetings

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### METM10 – a jamboree for editors and translators

*Mediterranean Editors and Translators Meeting 2010, Tarragona, Spain, 28-30 October 2010*

I first came across the Mediterranean Editors and Translators (MET) group after I joined the translation team on *Actas Dermosifiliográficas*, a bilingual dermatology journal produced by Elsevier. My motivation for attending the first MET meeting was partly the wish to put faces on the other members of a team I had only met virtually and partly the need for guidance to improve the quality of my medical output.

What greeted me was a community of supremely professional editors and translators willing to openly share their expertise in order to provide better language services and promote the related professions. Most of the sessions offered were practice-based, with real working examples of the issues in hand presented by experienced professionals.

The 2010 MET meeting, “Facilitating knowledge transfer – through editing, translation, coaching”, was held in Tarragona, Spain, from October 28 to 30 at the Universitat Rovira I Virgili. Each year I have attended, the programme has increased in range, breadth, and depth, and this year was no exception.

#### Before

Pre-conference workshops were presented by academics and practitioners, many of whom work in the production of medical, scientific, and academic texts either in university language support services or with direct clients seeking publication in journals. For me, the pick of the bunch were:

- Ailish Maher and Luci Vásquez, “Revision matters: why, how and how much?” This workshop provided translators and editors with revision guidelines and a table comparing how the elements of transfer, content, language and style, and presentation are involved in various types of editing and translation tasks – and the table offers a handy framework for quoting the deadline and price for a job.
- Darko Hren’s two sessions on practical statistics for editors rolled back the darkness around many statistical techniques used in research and provided advice on how to spot the most common mistakes. I was relieved to be informed that while editors must be able to identify weaknesses and errors in statistics, they do not necessarily have to be able to resolve them.
- Philip Bazire on dermatology: a three-hour workshop on the anatomy of the skin and basic principles of dermatology that was invaluable for members of the *Actas* team and others.

The one shortcoming of the MET meetings is that delegates can only be in one place at one time. Luckily, many of the workshops are run on a rolling programme at the annual meetings, and the more popular ones are

repeated at various times of the year, mainly in Barcelona. The ones I missed at METM10 included “Righting citing” by Iain Patten, helping editors to spot referencing errors or misplaced citations and suggesting ways to resolve these issues; Alan Lounds on how genre analysis can support editors and translators of research articles in improving abstracts and introductions; John Bates on approaches to effective paragraphing; Marije de Jager and Dado Cakalo with pointers on how editors should deal with plagiarism in science writing; and Felicity Neilson with an introduction to editing medical texts.

#### During

The conference proper had a rich programme of plenary speeches, panels, and parallel sessions of knowledge updates and promising practices for editors and translators. The full programme can be viewed at <http://www.metmeetings.org>.

Plenary speaker Emma Wagner of the EU Directorate General of Translation delivered an overview of the European Commission campaign for clear writing, born of their earlier “fight the fog” campaign. This was of special interest to those who were working on bids for EU editing contracts.

The panels and parallel sessions included gems such as Mary Ellen Kerans and David Cullen’s presentation on use of the Springer Exemplar corpus. They explained how this collection of peer-reviewed journals can be used to inform lexical choices in translation and editing. Mary Ellen and David pointed out the qualities and possible shortcomings of the Springer corpus and then demonstrated ways to achieve better matches and more appropriate search results by refining search techniques and interpreting the results intelligently.

Other afternoon sessions included my knowledge update on sensitive language, comparing style guide recommendations to actual usage of non-biased language in medical texts and journalism, and education-oriented presentations discussing the criteria for excellence in modern English writing and genre awareness.

Paola de Castro spoke about how the Italian National Institute of Health (Istituto Superiore di Sanità, Rome) is working with institutes and universities in the UK, Spain, Portugal, Colombia, and Brazil in NECOBELAC (the Network of Collaboration Between Europe & Latin American-Caribbean countries, [www.necobelac.eu](http://www.necobelac.eu)), to improve scientific writing, promote open access publication models, and foster technical and scientific cooperation and communication, specifically in the field of public health.

Another thread of the conference focused on presentation skills for researchers and speakers, with Joy Burrough-Boenisch and David Alexander advising on

the clear presentation of content in posters. They strongly suggested reordering information away from the typical IMRAD format that proves impossible to read from more than three paces, opting for some less-is-more, punch-them-in-the-eye principles that could also prove useful in other scenarios. Sara Freitas-Maltaverne ran a session on using storytelling principles in PowerPoint presentations, and Jean-Luc Doumont blew everyone away with his full-on approach to effective design, construction, and use of slides.

Posters on issues in translation, editing, and presentation were displayed in the coffee lounge, providing a surprising range of transferable tips on clarity and good communication.

Theoretical input was balanced by practical advice on issues like ergonomics, the best way to organize a work station – the practical aspects of multiple screens, docking stations, external hard drives – and peer-to-peer updates of tools available on the web for building quick-and-easy websites, improving organization, and increasing productivity.

The official schedule was supplemented by many opportunities for networking (and great food). Many members had come to the meeting in search of collaborators in linked portfolio areas ranging from a project to improve

the English communication skills of Spanish GPs, to bids for editing contracts and peer reviewing arrangements between translators and editors.

All contributors give their time and ideas freely in return for the benefits they receive from attending the meetings and most meetings are held in venues offered by MET supporters. As a result, the cost of these meetings is more than reasonable, keeping my trips from the UK comfortably within budget and making the investment-to-gain ratio highly favourable.

#### **After**

Plans are currently afoot for MET 2011 in Barcelona and the Spring Workshops will be listed on the website (<http://www.metmeetings.org>) soon. The benefits I have drawn from MET meetings lead me to strongly suggest you check out the website and put the event on your CPD plan for the coming year if you possibly can.

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## **Practical geoscience**

*44th Annual Meeting of the Association of Earth Science Editors, Victoria, BC, Canada, September 2010*

A tradition of the annual meetings of the Association of Earth Science Editors (AESE) is a half-day or day long geological field trip led by local experts to explore unusual features of the terrain near the meeting site. Cultural stops are also included for the less geologically inclined.

#### **Excursions real and virtual**

The first trip was an exploration of urban geology that could be viewed on a short walk around the meeting site. The leader started with an explanation of the local stones that had been used to pave the entrance to the hotel, then pointed out other features of the bay and exposed rocks in the nearby gardens, all of which helped in understanding the geological development of Vancouver Island. The walking field trip was also a practical example of how easy it is to introduce non-specialists to principles of earth science.

The second trip was a virtual one, showing the geological features surrounding the Dempster Highway, Canada's most northwestern road, which extends through the Yukon to the Mackenzie river delta. The real point of this visual excursion was, however, to explain how a multidisciplinary team of scientists had expanded their research expedition to write a 92-page guidebook that would be of interest to lay people, especially to geotourists. The team also developed a pamphlet-style geological map that highlighted 18 key features of this far northern area

(<http://ygsftp.gov.yk.ca/publications/yeg/yeg08/YEG/20-roots.pdf>). The pamphlet distilled information from the guidebook, was well illustrated, and was produced on material that could withstand being stored in the glove box of cars. For those editors who have as part of their mandate making scientific information available to the public, it was particularly satisfying to learn how much effort this team of researchers had put into bringing information about their research area to those outside the geological community. It was interesting for all to see the creativity that went into the design of the pamphlet-style map and how much content had been put into a very readable and visually interesting format.

#### **Practical workshops**

A new feature of this year's meeting was a series of three practical workshops, each dedicated to a different electronic tool: Adobe Acrobat Professional, the Google suite, and Adobe InDesign. When it comes to software, users tend to be self-taught. The purpose of these workshops was to extend users' knowledge in a more coherent way. The fourth workshop, "Geoscience 101", was an interactive session on various aspects of earth sciences, primarily for the non-specialist.

This reporter picked up a few tips for editing pdf files with Acrobat Professional, such as getting rid of the box

that is automatically created when using the text editing feature. The lack of standards continues to hamper effective use of this tool for editors. One can employ standard proofreader marks via “stamps”, although it is tedious to do so. Especially on long projects it is important to have a common understanding about the techniques to be used by all involved in the editing and production phases.

The head of a small, independent editing firm showed how she was able to save money by using the full set of Google products, including Google mail, documents, and calendar. She also uses Google’s Picasa to manage images both for client’s projects and for personal ones. She demonstrated how the Google suite had been used in organizing the AESE meeting and how using a public system did not interfere with restrictions that might be imposed by employers when their staff members are involved in volunteer activities.

### Technical sessions

In addition to the workshops, there were six technical sessions of contributed and invited talks on various aspects of editing and publishing in the geosciences and on making scientific information available to the public. Many AESE

members work for federal, provincial, or state geological surveys, where the mission is to produce and publish scientific results and to serve the public directly.

In one such session on archiving, three case studies underscored that the objectives of all geoscience data repositories are preservation, accessibility, and utilization for today’s and tomorrow’s researchers and students as well as for the public at large. Data that deserve to be collected and protected for the future are not always found in well-formatted documents, as the speakers made abundantly clear. They described the challenges of dealing with formats that ranged from scraps of handwriting to geological artifacts (such as well cores and fossil collections) and with sources that spanned more than 150 years and were geographically dispersed across a nation. The role of the editor in creating systems of access to these materials has become ever more important with the advent of web-based catalogues and other such finding tools.

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## Conferencing under fear

*Fifth Regional Conference on Medical Journals in the Eastern Mediterranean Region, Karachi, Pakistan, 2-5 December 2010*

Four conferences on medical journalism have already been held in the Eastern Mediterranean region (*ESE* 2004;30:18; *ESE* 2005;31:18; *ESE* 2009;35:14). When, during the third conference held in Shiraz, we decided to hold the fourth conference in Bahrain and the fifth one in Pakistan, no one knew that catastrophic flooding would affect most of Pakistan and several deadly explosions occur in Karachi.

When the first announcement of the conference was distributed, most of us hoped that the World Health Organization office in the Eastern Mediterranean Region, one of the bodies helping organize these conferences, would postpone the event to a better time or another place. Many of those who participated in the four previous conferences could find good reasons not to participate in the fifth in Karachi, and only a few foreign delegates attended – the brave hearts! A few of them could not sense the threat, but most could understand the situation but did not give in to fear. Delegates came from the UK, Croatia, Spain, Switzerland, Egypt, Iran, and other countries in the region.

When we arrived in Karachi airport, we were warmly welcomed and taken to our residence – the guest house at the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Pakistan, two minutes away from the Congress venue. The campus was apparently a very secure place and we spent most of our time there. I heard from other delegates that their hotels used a high level of security too. On the few occasions we went out of the campus, our bus was escorted by armed military guards.

Similar to previous congresses, there were three pre-congress workshops (on medical writing, medical editing,

and biostatistics) and four short workshops during the conference (on online and open-access resources, quality assessment tools for systematic reviews, journal indexing, and publication ethics). Talks were on publication and content quality, scientific research in the region, peer review and its alternatives, AuthorAid initiatives in the region, ethics of research and publication in the region, journal indexing, and evidence-based journalology. There was also a session for poster presentations. The difference I saw was that this time most of the delegates were more involved in discussions and congress activities.

During the conference, EMAME Executive Board members were elected, and participants had a lively discussion on future strategies of the association. Among the recommendations were: establishing national associations of medical editors in member countries; sharing information, knowledge, and experience with fellow editors in the region; organizing local meetings and training activities employing trainers available in the countries and the region; promoting gender balance on editorial boards of journals to ensure optimal representation of the community served by the journal; establishing journal websites and keeping them up to date; and supporting capacity-building in the region on medical publishing.

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## Scholarly outputs in health sciences: publication process and open access

*NECOBELAC Project Training Course, Rome, 18-20 October 2010*

The training course organized by the NECOBELAC project (see *ESE* August 2009;35(3):81-2) aimed at improving the production and quality of scientific documents and at increasing the visibility and availability of research results by supporting open access publishing initiatives. Project partners collaborate to organize and realize training activities for future trainers (T1 courses), who will then replicate training modules at local level (T2 courses).

The T1 training course held in Rome had three sessions: NECOBELAC project activities and future actions; experiences and group work; reports of group works, sustainability of project activities, and final evaluation. About 30 professionals from selected Italian institutions attended; they have already been involved in the issues at stake and committed themselves to replicate the course at local level, thus guaranteeing a larger and longer impact and the sustainability of the project. Such derivative courses can be flexible, including – if necessary – additional modules, and have a longer duration, according to local requirements.

### Maps and repositories

On the first day of the course Paola De Castro (Project Coordinator, ISS) illustrated the aims of the project, describing in detail the training programme and the role of future NECOBELAC trainers. Creating awareness on the importance of scientific writing and the open access publication model could lead to new scientific collaborations. Daniela Marsili (ISS) talked about the implementation strategy of the project and the development of cooperation among the EU-LAC countries.

The use of conceptual maps in training and their application to the project modules was presented by Reme Melero (Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, Madrid). A topic map represents information using “topics”, “associations”, and “occurrences” and has a triple subject-predicate-object structure. Publication process and open access are represented by topic maps that use the Ontopia technology as the framework to represent and offer a graphical visualization of the structure of the training courses. Carlos Agudelo (Director, Instituto de Salud Pública, Bogotá) reported some experiences of scientific and technical collaborations in Latin American countries to improve scientific writing.

The second day of the course included an introduction to scientific knowledge dissemination through journals. Abel Packer (BIREME, Brazil) reported experiences of some LAC editors of public health journals, focusing on editorial policies (open access), peer review process, ethical issues, research communication, and cultural differences, and presented data from SciELO Brazil, the electronic library covering a selection of Brazilian scientific journals. The SciELO experience for the diffusion, dissemination and access to scientific information in LAC countries was also the subject of Lilian Nassi Calò's (BIREME, Brazil) speech.

Elisabetta Poltronieri (ISS) described DSpace ISS, the ISS digital institutional repository: it currently holds about 30,000 items and aims at providing access to the full text of publications within the framework of the open access environment. Together with its own publications, DSpace holds a selection of bibliographic data provided from Italian partner institutions in the field of public health.

After a presentation of the two main NECOBELAC training modules “Scientific publication” and “Open access” by Paola De Castro and Reme Melero, aiming at creating awareness among the participants on the importance of both issues for the dissemination of information in public health, the future trainers were encouraged to propose and solve practical editorial issues, working in small groups and using the newly acquired skills. In particular, they were asked to discuss and draw up a training programme at local level.

The third day was devoted to discussions, evaluation, and results. Any working group presented its own proposal. This was a central moment of the course, interactive and productive, in which both trainees and trainers examined and discussed the core issues of the training course, possible solutions, and the role of future trainers.

Celina Ramjoué (Directorate-General for Research, EU) discussed the role of the EU in disseminating scientific information, in particular of open access public health information across Europe, and related European framework research programmes.

### Bogotá Declaration

At the international training course for trainers (T1) that took place in Bogotá, Colombia, in November 2010, NECOBELAC project partners and other academic and public health institutions in Latin American countries approved and signed the “Bogotá Declaration” (available at [www.necobelac.eu](http://www.necobelac.eu)) in the four project languages. Course participants representing institutions from seven Latin American countries (Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Cuba, Ecuador, Mexico, Peru) committed themselves to replicating the training experience in the institutions of their countries, while the NECOBELAC project partners representing European (Italy, Spain, Portugal, United Kingdom) and Latin American (Brazil and Colombia) institutions committed themselves to providing advice and tools to achieve these objectives.

In 2011 an intensive programme of training activities will involve other health-related institutions in Europe and in LAC countries, promoting new contacts and strengthening already established scientific collaborations. Courses are planned in Spain, Portugal, the UK, Argentina, and Mexico.

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