

FROM THE GUEST EDITOR

(Re)Discovering the Necessity of Craft in Health Communication

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As I write this in May, the tumult of public life has challenged even those who typically reach for the assurance of “this too shall pass.” It will. But what will we find there? That answer, of course, is being worked out—in classrooms, boardrooms, examination rooms, courtrooms, and kitchens.

As health communicators, our work to bring clarity to complexity, to connect evidence with empathy, has never felt more essential or exposed. Between the still-unfolding dilemmas around the use of generative artificial intelligence (AI), dwindling grant funding, and the shifting presence of trusted authorities in public health, we find ourselves rafting through turbulent waters.

Talking about craft, I admit, might seem like a luxury. But in truth, it is a lifeline. Craft—the intuitive, skilled decisions that lead to clear, effective communication—is what holds when everything else shifts. It helps the public navigate the whitewater of disinformation, fragmented care, and confusion. It steadies them long enough to understand, to choose, to act. It earns back trust. And trust, right now, is endangered.

For decades, we operated in a shared public square—imperfect, yes, but functional. Experts were trusted. Guidelines were followed. Institutions held weight. Today, that square is fractured and noisy. The voices that people once leaned on are now just one among thousands. And because information moves faster than understanding, the public is left adrift, trying to make confident decisions in a sea of contradiction and noise.

This issue of the *AMWA Journal* arrives at a moment when craft is more than a professional virtue—it is a moral necessity. Clear, thoughtful communication is essential to serving the public interest and supporting the public in making informed health decisions for themselves and their families. Whether someone is considering a treatment, enrolling in a clinical trial, or caring for a loved one, the way we craft words and images shapes those choices not just in clinical settings, but across the full spectrum of health literacy.

In this issue, you’ll find themed articles looking at ethics and use cases for generative AI in developing images, the role and vulnerabilities of readability tools, and the place of metaphor in health communication, backdropped by the primacy of craft in health communication. This issue, I hope,

also offers a reminder that writing is not merely a conveyance of facts.

Every paragraph we write contains a small social contract between communicator and audience, between subject-matter experts and laypersons, or between a system and someone trying to survive within it. We uphold those contracts with the decisions we make not just as researchers and experts, but as practitioners. As those responsible for choosing the right words in the right order for the right audience, when we uphold that contract with humility, accuracy, and empathy, we help the public move forward even amid the noise, even when trust is scarce.

But we cannot extend clarity to others unless we cultivate it ourselves. That begins with our commitment to craft, not just a commitment to accuracy nor to correct grammar. True craft—the slow and principled work of listening, distilling, shaping, and refining, choosing structure with intention, translating complexity without flattening truth.

Yes, we use tools. Yes, we adapt to platforms. But craft is what makes us trustworthy in a landscape that desperately needs people who still care about getting it right. When we’re tempted to shrink back or to wait for stability to return before we write bravely again, let this serve as a reminder: the public doesn’t have that luxury. Health decisions don’t pause until the world calms down. And so, our work—sometimes invisible, often unglamorous—becomes all the more vital.

Keep refining your skill. Keep sharpening your ear for plain language. Keep advocating for transparency when others are hedging. This is how we meet the moment—not with panic or passivity, but with purpose.

In all the noise, people still want to understand. That’s still our job. And it still matters—for this too shall pass.

Author declaration and disclosures: *The author notes no commercial associations that may pose a conflict of interest in relation to this article.*

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