

The B E L S Letter

Published by the Board of Editors in the Life Sciences

April 2009 • No. 40

First BELS Certification Exam in India

By S. Kim Berman, MS, ELS

In the fall of 2007, BELS was contacted by Elvira D'souza of Cactus Communications in Mumbai, India, about the possibility of offering the certification exam to scientific editors in the region. We had offered exams in a variety of locations outside the US over the years but never in India. However, given the growing population of scientific editors in India and the importance of global communication today, the Executive Council (after an often spirited debate) gave the OK to proceed.

During the EC's discussion, my first thought was that we had a few BELS-certified editors in India who could administer the exam for us, so we'd simply hand over the procedures to them. Oh well, I thought, another place that I wouldn't get to visit as a BELS proctor, remembering prior offers to proctor the exam in Australia and Europe. So when Leslie Neistadt told me that we didn't have BELS members to administer the exam and then asked me whether I would like to take a little trip to Mumbai, I



Exam takers in Mumbai

jumped at the chance.

Arranging for travel to Mumbai proved an interesting challenge. We learned that we could travel either east (via Europe) or west (via Asia), which multiplied the options exponentially. The Travelocity, Orbitz, and Kayak Web sites became our constant companions as we tried to find reasonably priced itineraries that wouldn't

require 4 days of travel in each direction and 10 days to recover from jet lag on the return.

Fast-forward to September and you would have seen me checking the validity of my passport, waiting patiently for my visa, getting four immunizations, reading all the US State Department literature on travel to India, and hoping that I wouldn't forget to put

everything in my suitcase.

November 11th found me on the train from the Albany-Rensselaer Amtrak Station to New York City, then connecting to a train to the airport in Newark, and hoping that I'd find Leslie waiting for me in the terminal after her flight from Atlanta. As an experienced business traveler, I was prepared for the long haul across the Atlantic Ocean to Amsterdam (our layover destination). After all, I had three books to read and my travel pillow, along with a few TSA-allowed snacks, and an aisle seat, so I was **ready** (if not eager) to spend 10 hours in a coach-class seat.

Arriving in Amsterdam early the next morning and trudging through a terminal decorated for Christmas was very disorienting. We found our luggage, located the train station, and caught the correct train to take us to Central Station downtown. We weren't able to get to our rooms early in the day, so we indulged ourselves with some sightseeing. The Rijksmuseum was undergoing renovations, but the museum staff had collected some of the most memorable works of the Dutch Masters and installed them in a few galleries for viewing. Amsterdam, I learned during our day there, is very much a walking and biking city. We saw what appeared to be a huge parking garage near the train station, but it was actually a garage for storing your bike, **not** your car! I wish we had had more time to see the city, but our small taste of Amsterdam (including the sightseeing bus tour) made me want to return soon.

We were off to Mumbai the next day, on a packed 9-hour



The MedLife Team at Cactus Communications

flight that landed at midnight. It was overwhelming to see the crowd of people waiting for deplaning passengers as we left the terminal, row after row of men holding up little cards with names scrawled on them, all trying to locate their friend/client/passenger as we wearily shuffled out of the building with our bags. The congestion of people, cars, trucks, buses, and three-wheel cabs (auto-rickshaws) was amazing. I was surprised that we were able to find the driver our hotel had sent us, but our editorial eyes must have been working well despite the late hour. The minibus took us on a wild ride through Mumbai to the hotel; we checked in and got a few hours of sleep before starting that day's examination preparation.

Our hotel, not the typical tourist-focused chain that I'd anticipated, was situated on the shore of the Arabian Sea, with a patio dining area overlooking the water. We saw people out for their morning walks along the beach while we sat on the patio eating breakfast each morning. On the first morning in Mumbai, we were not allowed to dine on the patio, however, because a local TV crew was using that space for a

shoot! The realization that I was in "Bollywood," the home of India's film industry, hit right at that moment, while watching the make-up artist and hair stylist emphasize the camera-ready perfection of the woman with a microphone.

Our hosts for the trip, Cactus Communications, provided us with a driver to help us get around the city. After five minutes in the car, I understood why they recommended this, although while planning for the trip, we thought a driver might be an unnecessary luxury. Traffic in Mumbai, even late at night, was mind-boggling! I've lived in some of the most traffic-burdened cities in the US, but still couldn't fathom how anyone got anywhere in less than 2 hours in Mumbai (L.N.: They don't!). The cars, buses, trucks, and mini-cabs were usually bumper to bumper on all of the roads. (L.N.: Interestingly, though, we didn't see a single traffic accident, which suggests that the Indians know much more about driving than do those of us in the US.) I doubt I could have driven a mile without hitting something, and I know I'd never be able to find my way back to the hotel!

Continued on page 4

BELS Members Garner Leadership Roles in AMWA

By Misty R. Bailey, MA, ELS

Cindy Worsley Hamilton, PharmD, ELS (2002), principal of Hamilton House, a medical writing and editing firm in Virginia Beach, VA, has been named president of AMWA. Hamilton organized AMWA's 2003 annual conference and also served AMWA as treasurer and administrator of chapters. At home, she enjoys gardening, which she says complements her work.



"Strolling through my garden," Hamilton adds, "provides inspiration for overcoming writers block, and pruning puts me in a better mood for dealing with reviewers' comments."

Thomas Gegeny, MS, ELS (1999), is now the AMWA president-elect after a 3-year term as the organization's secretary. Before that, he held posts as administrator for Web and Internet technology (WIT), the annual conference, publications, and membership, among his many other services to AMWA. Gegeny is currently a medical writer at Envision Pharma in



Southport, CT, but hopes to soon extend his writing skills to a cookbook. Around Southport, Gegeny is known as a terrific cook and entertaining host, and each spring, he co-organizes a chili cook-off.

Picking up where Gegeny leaves off as secretary is **Mary G. Royer, MS, ELS (1992)**, also a past recipient of the President's Award, given in recognition of exceptional service to the association. Royer is former WIT and publications administrator for AMWA and has held countless committee positions since 1990. Her work as a freelance medical writer and editor in Ithaca, NY, began after she realized she was allergic to rats while working in a pathology laboratory. When a position opened for a medical writer, Royer "grabbed it" and realized she enjoyed the work.

Finally, **Susan Aiello, DVM, ELS (1991)** has been named administrator of workshops for the American Medical Writers Association's 69th Annual Conference. The meeting, titled "Blazing the Trail," is expected to attract more than 1,000 attendees, who will gather Oct. 22-24 in Dallas. Aiello is a partner in WordsWorld Consulting, a freelance medical writing and editing business based in Dayton, Ohio.

Nota Bene

Linda J. Kesselring, MS, ELS, was the copy editor for *Emergency Medicine: A Focused Review of the Core Curriculum*. This 22-chapter book, published by the American Academy of Emergency Medicine in October 2008, will be used by residents preparing for certification exams.

Please send in any items about awards, promotions, or new projects. Your fellow BELS members would love to see good news about their colleagues!

COULD YOU BE THE NEXT BELS LETTER EDITOR?

BELS is currently looking for an editor for the *BELS Letter*. This is a way to contribute to the organization and to meet a bunch of great people. If you are interested, please contact Mary Ann Schmidt at maryanns@andrew.cmu.edu.

BELS Exam in India (continued from page 2)

The staff at Cactus was very welcoming and friendly, giving us a tour of their offices, walking us through a typical work day, and briefing us on how they interact with their international clients. We were very impressed by the level of in-house training and testing that even their experienced writers and editors go through. Continuing education is a very important part of their corporate philosophy, with experienced staff members setting up training programs in-house for their newer editors, designing online training programs for the staff, and working within all parts of the company to ensure that the staff delivers quality products to their clients.

Elvira, our contact for BELS exam arrangements (and super-human model of organization), had addressed all of the logistical nightmares that even an experienced BELS proctor could envision. She arranged for us to have a driver to get us to the exam venue, she found a copy shop that would produce all of our testing materials, and she found a great location for the exam itself. The private school that she found was available because we were holding the exam on the weekend. We



Anurag Goel, Abhishek Goel, Elvira D'souza, Ravi Murugesan, Leslie Neistadt, and Kim Berman

were able to get there early, set up our classroom, and be ready for the examinees without any hassles. Oh yes, there was that stray dog who kept walking down the hall and looking into the room while we were getting ready, but he seemed like a friendly sort.

I have to admit that I really enjoy warm weather (even though I'm from the Northeastern US), so leaving a chilly upstate NY November for a warm and hazy Mumbai November was not a big sacrifice. Holding a BELS exam in an open air classroom with whirling ceiling fans and unscreened windows was a little breezier and "buzzier" than our typical environment, but I think it went well. I got to watch the weekend cricket club playing outside the window, while our certification candidates pondered the nuances of English grammar and sentence structure. Somehow, I think I had the better part of that bargain!

Our four days in India went by quickly, as we gave the BELS exam over two consecutive days to 40 registrants. However, we both had work deadlines waiting at home, so we packed our bags with the few souvenirs we had purchased and drove to the airport for our 2 a.m. departure from Mumbai. The flight back to the US, with my subsequent train ride

up the Hudson River, gave me time to reflect on the experience of going to India.

I find that one of the pleasures of traveling to another country

is often obtained by just absorbing the environment around you, watching how the residents exist in the place you are visiting. Having local people show us their favorite restaurants (and being adventurous when it comes to hot and spicy food), getting recommendations from our driver and guide on what to see and do in the city (visiting a Krishna temple, seeing the lights of the city from the Malabar Hills, touring Mahatma Gandhi's home, stopping on the side of the road late at night to watch the huge open-air laundries), and interacting with the staff at our hotel (No, really, I like having spinach parantha, mango, and yogurt for breakfast) all helped to provide me with a taste of the little bit of India that I got to visit.

There are still some questions that I never got answered - Are there rules on when you do or don't wear a sari? Does everyone live with their parents until they are married? Why do so many movies have big dance sequences in the middle of the story? What is cricket really all about?

I'm thinking this will require another trip to India to resolve, so when BELS calls again to see if I'm interested in proctoring, I'll dust off my passport and pack my bag.

Postscript: The shocking Mumbai terrorist attacks occurred just days after we left. We were able to reach Elvira within hours of the attacks and were glad to learn that all her colleagues were accounted for and safe. We sincerely hope that future tourists and businesspeople will not be deterred from traveling to this fascinating city, which has so much to offer visitors.

BELS 18th Annual Meeting and Banquet in Pittsburgh

We'll be gathering at Bravo Franco in Pittsburgh's theatre district. The restaurant is within walking distance (or a very short cab ride) of the Hilton.

Place: Bravo Franco Ristorante, 613 Penn Avenue.

Time: 6 pm, Monday, May 4, 2009.

Menu: Your choice of ONE of the following:

_____ Broiled filet of sole

_____ Veal Marsala/Piccata/Romano (choice of one preparation method, to be made at the restaurant)

_____ Chicken Romano/Piccata/Marsala (choice of one preparation method, to be made at the restaurant)

All dinner choices include cup of soup, house salad, side dish, ice cream or sorbet dessert, and coffee, tea, or soft drink.

Cost: US\$30 per person (guests are welcome).

You must reserve by April 28, 2009. Here's how:

Fill out the bottom of this notice and MAIL it (do not e-mail it) to BELS Treasurer, Box 489, Parkton, MD 21120, with your check or money order (or credit card information) for US\$30 per person payable to BELS.

Name: _____

Number of guests: _____

Name of guest: _____

___ I am enclosing my check in the amount of \$ _____

___ Please charge my credit card \$ _____

Credit card type: _____

Expiration date: _____

Credit card no.: _____

BELS Welcomes Our Newest Members !

Exam 98
Bridgewater, NJ
October 4, 2008

Abbie Abboud, MS, ELS
Woodbury, Minnesota

Carol DiBerardino, MLA, ELS
Lindenwold, New Jersey

Sue A. Elam, ELS
Oak Ridge, New Jersey

Patricia Faggioli, ELS)
Royersford, Pennsylvania

Donald M. Harting, MA, ELS
Chester Springs, Pennsylvania

Ann Houska, MA, ELS
Telford, Pennsylvania

Beth Jenkinson, ELS
Havertown, Pennsylvania

Jennifer Maybin, MA, ELS
Branchburg, New Jersey

Katharine O'Moore-Klopf, ELS
East Setauket, New York

Stephanie Z. Pavlou, MA, ELS
Marlton, New Jersey

Patti R. Rosenfelder, ELS
Fort Collins, Colorado

Lucinda Treadwell, MS, ELS
Hudson, Maine

Andrea Vardaro Tucker, ELS
Yardley, Pennsylvania

William F. Young, Jr, MD, ELS
Rochester, Minnesota

Exam 99
Louisville, KY
October 22, 2008

Roderick W. Everhart, ELS
Indianapolis, Indiana

Robert A. Foster, ELS
St Louis, Missouri

Geralyn A. Keane, RN, BSN, MSS, ELS
Arvada, Colorado

Kathleen LaPoint, MS, ELS
Greensboro, North Carolina

Rebecca Luttrell, ELS
Chicago, Illinois

Michael McGregor, MA, ELS
Brooklyn, New York

Upcoming Conferences

The Council of Science Editors will hold its annual meeting in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, May 1-5, 2009. You can find information at <http://www.councilscienceeditors.org/events/annualmeeting09/index.cfm>.

The Sixth International Congress on Peer Review and Biomedical Publication will be held September 10-12, 2009, in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada. Information at <http://www.jama-peer.org>

The European Association of Science Editors (EASE) will hold its annual conference September 16-19, 2009 in Pisa, Italy. Information at <http://www.ease.org/uk>.

"Getting the Message Across," the 4th Annual Institute of Professional Editors (IPEd) Conference, is to be held in Adelaide, Australia, October 8-10, 2009. Information is available at <http://www.editors-sa.org.au> or at the conference page (<http://soceds.wordpress.com/>).

Science Writers 2009 will be held in Austin, Texas, October 16-20, 2009. Information at <http://www.sciencewriters2009.org/>.

The 2009 AMWA Conference, "Blazing the Trail" will be held October 22-24, 2009, in Dallas, Texas. Information available at <http://www.amwa.org>.

The Association of Earth Science Editors will hold its annual meeting October 29 to November 1, 2009, in Houston, Texas. Information at <http://www.aese.org>

The 29th European Medical Writers Association meeting will be held in Frankfurt, Germany, November 12-14, 2009.

Lisa Rinehart, ELS
Glen Burnie, Maryland

Colleen M. Sauber, ELS
Minneapolis, Minnesota

Lara Tolbert, PhD, ELS
Issaquah, Washington

Exam 100
Mumbai, India
November 15, 2008

Himani Jain, Msc, ELS
Mumbai, Maharashtra, India

Rucha Kurtkoti, MSc, ELS
Mumbai, Maharashtra, India

Dushyant Pawaksar, ELS
Mumbai, Maharashtra, India

Velany Rodrigues, MSc, ELS
Mumbai, Maharashtra, India

Susheel A. Sequeira, ELS
Mumbai, Maharashtra, India

Roma Subramanian, MSc, ELS
Thane West, Maharashtra, India

Exam 101
Mumbai, India
November 16, 2008

Thiruvengadathan Arun, PhD, ELS
Vashi, Navi Mumbai, Maharashtra, India

Mriganka Awati, MSc, ELS
Mumbai, Maharashtra, India

Clarinda Cerejo, MSc, ELS
Mumbai, Maharashtra, India

Sian Claire D'Costa, ELS
Mumbai, Maharashtra, India

Elvira D'souza, MBA, ELS
Mumbai, Maharashtra, India

Yateendra Joshi, ELS
Pune, Maharashtra, India

Amrita Karnik, MBBS, ELS
Mumbai, Maharashtra, India

Ashlesha Rodrigues, MSc, ELS
Mumbai, Maharashtra, India

Leona Rodrigues, ELS
Mumbai, Maharashtra, India

Sonja Soares, MA, ELS
Mumbai, Maharashtra, India

Shalaka Talpade, MBBS, ELS
Mumbai, Maharashtra, India

Veena Venkateshwaran, ELS
Mumbai, Maharashtra, India

Nilima V. Vyas, BHMS, ELS
Mumbai, Maharashtra, India

Thank you, Proctors!

The following BELS members generously donated their time to be proctors in 2008.

Jonathan Blanding and Leslie Neistadt
Asilomar, March 30

Tracey Fine, Jennifer King, and Carol Kohn
Chapel Hill, May 2, 2008

Laura Haynes, Leslie Neistadt, and Barbara Tomlin
Vancouver, May 17

Joan Affleck, Greg Cuca, Laura Klein, and Barbara Schwedel
Bridgewater, October 4

Lyn Camire, Claire Levine, and Mary Anne Mitchell
Louisville, October 22

Kim Berman and Leslie Neistadt
Mumbai, November 15-16

Upcoming BELS Exams

Date	Location	Meeting	Register by
May 1, 2009	Chapel Hill, North Carolina	AMWA Chapter	April 10, 2009
May 2, 2009	Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania	CSE	April 11, 2009
August 1, 2009	Abbott Park, Illinois	AMWA Chapter	July 11, 2009
September 17, 2009	Pisa, Italy	EASE	August 27, 2009
October 21, 2009	Dallas, Texas	AMWA	September 30, 2009
May 14, 2010	Atlanta, Georgia	CSE	April 17, 2010

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