

The **BELS** Letter

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Enthusiastic, Extroverted, Energetic

New BELS President Enjoys a Good Party

By Don Harting, ELS, CHCP

He's been described as fun, extroverted, and exceptionally bright. Those who have edited his writing say it is concise and easy to read. What's more, his closest friends say he's a good cook and he loves to throw parties.

He's Thomas "Tom" Gegeny, MS, ELS, the new president of BELS.

Stephen Palmer, PhD, ELS, incoming president of the American Medical Writers Association, got to know Tom through the AMWA Southwest Chapter beginning around 2003. Tom was president-elect of the chapter then, and working as senior editor at The Center for AIDS Information & Advocacy in Houston, TX. Steve describes Tom as an "energetic, enthusiastic guy who's always very upbeat."

Steve still remembers the time more than 10 years ago when he was invited to Tom's house for a Christmas party. More than 100 people had already arrived. Music played on the stereo, catering staff served delicious appetizers, and every room seemed so packed

Steve could barely move. "I've always liked Tom," Steve says. "BELS is lucky to have him as president."

Another Texas friend is Christine Wogan, MS, ELS, AMWA treasurer. Like Steve, Chris met Tom through the AMWA Southwest Chapter. Chris recalls being impressed by Tom's mastery of technical information related to library science.

"No matter where he ends up, he always seems to rise to the top really quickly," Chris observed.

Marianne Mallia, ELS, agrees. Marianne served as AMWA president from 2002 to 2003 and now chairs the AMWA certification commission. She describes Tom as "very outgoing, creative, and interested in learning." Marianne continues: "If anyone asks Tom to do something, he will. He always says yes. He has boundless energy. And he makes a great margarita."

Tom grew up in Connecticut. He went to graduate school in Houston, earning a master's degree



Thomas Gegeny, MS, ELS
BELS President 2015-17

in biomedical science. He worked his way through grad school waiting tables at Baba Yega's, a funky café known for its Sunday brunches and mimosas. Tom attained ELS certification in 1999. He stayed in Houston through 2006 and then moved back East to be closer to his parents. But he missed his friends so much that he found a small apartment in Houston to make it easy to visit. He cooked dinner for Steve and his wife there recently — Steve fondly remembers the spicy, Southwest-style tomato soup.

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Tom was president of AMWA from 2009 to 2010. He has been recognized 3 times for his contributions to that organization. He co-chaired AMWA's certification commission during the development of its new credentialing exam, set to debut in San Antonio later this month. His current job title is Stakeholder Engagement Leader at Clear Pharma in Westport, CT.

Tom assumed the position of BELS president in May. In an interview with *The BELS Letter*, Tom outlined goals for his 2-year term.

Q: Why did you want to be president of BELS?

A: It's a chance for me to give back to the organization. I've always felt the work BELS does is important.

Q: What do you hope to accomplish during your term?

A: I have 3 main goals. First, I want to strengthen the infrastructure by working with an association management company that can allocate resources and assign support staff to take care of administrative and maintenance aspects.

Q: What would the company do?

A: Reserve hotel and meeting space, operate the website, maintain the membership database, things like that. I want to get the right support to make us a stronger organization and take some of the burden off of our volunteers.

Q: What's your second goal?

A: I want to grow volunteerism. We need to understand our membership

structure, and consider other ways people can continue to be involved or become involved in BELS. I'd like to be more transparent with what's being done behind the scenes at the committee level, and show how people can align their professional goals with volunteer opportunities within BELS.

Q: And your third goal?

A: It's about the exam itself. We need to bring in consultants and our own experts to help us work on the exam, think about how it is administered, think about best practices, and consider how credentialing has changed in the past 2 decades. I want to ensure that, from a best practices point of view, and from a credentialing perspective, BELS is meeting the needs of folks in the profession. This may mean linking the exam and what it tests with data from surveyed professionals in the field, perhaps identifying areas where we don't test enough, or areas where we test too much. These are ways we can strengthen the examination and keep it relevant and responsive to the needs of the profession.

Q: BELS was founded in 1991. Where do you see BELS now?

A: BELS is a tremendous organization. Worldwide we have more than 1,200 ELS-certified individuals. That's a tremendous accomplishment. What's most impressive is that our 25-year history has been 100% volunteer driven. That's amazing. BELS is at the stage now where it's critical to get support for those volunteers, to maintain stability and consistency.

Q: Do you have any other initiatives in mind?

A: I'm working with BELS Secretary, Melissa Bogen, ELS, to gather

materials from members of the Executive Council (EC). We're putting together a handbook to inform new people about what their positions involve, and help ensure continuity. Nothing like this has been done before. We're also working on a membership survey and a strategic plan.

Q: Where do you think BELS presents the greatest challenge?

A: Infrastructure and volunteerism. BELS has been effectively and efficiently run by just a handful of volunteers, some of whom have been involved for many years. We need to bring in new faces, new ideas, and a new sense of commitment for BELS's next 25 years. I'll admit, I can be overly ambitious and optimistic at times, even Pollyannaish, but getting half of something done (and done well) is better than not trying at all.

Q: I understand you enjoy a party.

A: [Laughs] Yes, down in Texas, there was a time for about 12–15 years, that my friends and I hosted a standing-room-only party, generally between 300 and 400 guests. I would do a lot of the food prep and the menu, but I would have staff on board so I didn't have to go crazy. Yes, I enjoy a good party.

Q: We're coming up on our 25th anniversary in January. Do you have any feasts planned for the BELS membership?

A: Let's just say that next year, I'm not opposed to persuading the EC to help me organize a BELS birthday bash.





Volunteer Spotlight



Katharine O'Moore-Klopf, ELS

Administrator

BELS Facebook and Twitter accounts

How did you become interested in BELS?

My only degree is a bachelor's in journalism. But I've worked for years, both in house and then as a self-employed editor, in science and medical publishing. A portion of my clientele consists of physician-researchers around the world who are not native English speakers. In the past, when some of these authors were referred to me, they assumed that to be able to edit biomedical manuscripts, I must have an advanced academic degree—a master's in science, or even a PhD or an MD. I began thinking about what I could do to get across to such potential clients my mastery of science editing. I read somewhere about BELS certification and wondered whether I could achieve it. My colleague Julia Barrett, ELS, cheered me on and gave me the courage to take the examination. If it weren't for her encouragement, I still might not have certification today.

How long have you been volunteering for BELS?

I've been serving as the main person posting to the BELS Facebook page and tweeting via its Twitter account since 2009.



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What do you like best about it?

I can fit it in around my projects as a self-employed editor. I enjoy keeping our members updated about science-editing news and educational programs. I love announcing the names of those who have just earned their BELS certification! I'm so proud of each new batch of certified editors!



Katharine O'Moore-Klopf, ELS

How could your experience as a volunteer be improved?

Maybe having a backup to compose tweets and post updates when I'm on deadline or vacation.

There's a lot of info in your e-mail signature block — what are you the most proud of?

I love having that ELS designation because it shows that I'm well qualified and because I hope that it sparks questions from e-mail correspondents who don't know what it means.

What's been the biggest surprise

since you took over the BELS page on Facebook and the BELS Twitter account?

There is always something new to write about! In the beginning, I had fears that we'd be repeating the same few messages after a while because we'd run out of topics.

What has been the biggest challenge?

Increasing the number of viewers who respond to Facebook posts and tweets. We get a fairly good number of "likes" and "favorites," but I'd love to see more viewers making comments.

Do your plans for the BELS page on Facebook and for the BELS Twitter account involve volunteers?

Definitely. I want to keep increasing the number of people who follow us, but I especially want to increase the frequency of dialogue between BELS and its social media followers.

What message would you send to a recent exam passer who is thinking about volunteering?

Do you want to increase the value of your new certification? Then spread the word about it by volunteering. Proctor an exam. Help with the BELS newsletter. Help make BELS more visible in social media.

Like BELS on Facebook!

Nota Bene

Deborah Bowman, MFA, ELS, is co-author of an article in *Editorial Office News*, the publication of the International Society of Managing and Technical Editors, entitled "The Impact Factor: For Better or For Worse."

Rachel Box, MS, ELS, has joined the Johns Hopkins School of Medicine as director of editorial services for the Department of Orthopaedic Surgery. Rachel previously worked for the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health.

Dave L. Chance, MA, ELS, has 3 new books (print and digital) on which he was lead editor: Milner D. *Diagnostic Pathology: Infectious Diseases*; Auerbach A, Vasef M. *Diagnostic Pathology: Molecular Oncology*; and Lindberg M. *Diagnostic Pathology: Soft Tissue Tumors*, 2nd edition. All were published in 2015 in Salt Lake City, UT by Elsevier/Amirsys.

Mary L. Chang, ELS, publications manager at the American Society for Biochemistry and Molecular Biology in Rockville, MD, received the inaugural Award for Excellence from the International Society of Managing and Technical Editors in August 2015.

Claudia M. Cuddy, MA, ELS, served as managing editor and layout designer for the 6-volume *Core Curriculum for Nephrology Nursing*, published in April by the American Nephrology Nurses' Association. In addition, she retired after 21 years in the Department of Journalism at

Rowan University in Glassboro, NJ. More time now for editing nursing books!

Michelle Dalton, ELS, is president-elect of the Delaware Valley chapter of the American Medical Writers Association. Michelle will serve in this position until 2016, when she will then become chapter president.

As part of her work with the Breast Health Global Initiative (BHGI), **Sandra Ripley Distelhorst, ELS**, was first author on a *Lancet Oncology* article published in March 2015: "Optimisation of the Continuum of Supportive and Palliative Care for Patients with Breast Cancer in Low-income and Middle-income Countries."

Needs assessments and grant proposals written or edited by **Don Harting MA, ELS, CHCP**, have won more than \$834,000 in commercial support for accredited continuing medical education since July 1, 2014. Awards came in the following therapeutic areas: acute and chronic leukemias, B-cell lymphomas, breast cancer, and non-small cell lung cancer.

Ann Houska, MA, ELS, founded [Eagle Eye Edit](#), a full-service editing service, in 2014. She offers AMA-style copyediting and fact checking of pharmaceutical/medical/therapeutic/advertising deliverables, including slide decks, interactive learning/training modules, journal articles, abstracts, posters, and websites. Today, with 6 steady clients, Ann couldn't be busier—or happier.

Karen Klein, MA, ELS, will speak at the 1st national scientific meeting of the Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institute (PCORI) on October 7, 2015 in Arlington, VA. She will be one of three panelists for a session entitled "An Evaluation of PCORI's Merit Review."

Eleanor Mayfield, ELS, earned a certificate in medical writing and editing from the University of Chicago Graham School. Her article "Treating Advanced Skin Cancer" won an award for excellence in the health and medical writing category of the APEX '15 publication excellence awards. Her article on advances in colorectal cancer management appears in the Summer 2015 issue of [A Woman's Health](#).

In March, 2015, **Lisa Ragsdale, MA, ELS**, was promoted to the position of scientific journal editor at the American Society of Radiologic Technologists in Albuquerque, NM. In that role, Lisa manages *Radiologic Technology*, an academic journal for members of the radiologic sciences profession.

Bushra Rashid, PhD, ELS, worked as editorial head for several publishing companies and managed more than 10 medical books in various disciplines at Wiley, her last organization. At present, she is a full-time freelance medical editor working primarily for clients from countries such as China, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia.

