

MEMBER PROFILE: **Ada P. Kahn, MPH, PhD**

By Bettijane Eisenpreis

Ada Kahn didn't plan to be a medical writer. As a journalism student at Northwestern University, she intended to be a magazine editor, so, after graduation, she became assistant editor of *Inplant Food Management* magazine and *The Matrix*, the national publication of Theta Sigma Phi, a society for women journalists. Her next job was as a food writer for a public relations agency, and while there, she became interested in writing about promoting better health. The American Medical Association (AMA) then hired Dr Kahn to edit a book on current medical terminology. Now "officially" a medical writer, she began to get freelance assignments in the health care field and started writing books.

While Dr Kahn was attending an AMA meeting in San Francisco, she heard about a seminar on medical writing that the Northern California Chapter of AMWA was hosting the next day. She went to the seminar, joined AMWA, and then learned there was a chapter in her home town of Chicago. She became involved with the Greater Chicago Area Chapter and, she says, "Soon I was elected Treasurer, and then President. I've been active in AMWA ever since." Dr Kahn began attending AMWA annual conferences in 1974, and she has led at least 1 workshop, forum, open session, or roundtable at almost every annual conference since 1977. Her topics have included the business aspects of freelance writing, public relations, writing book proposals, stress, presentation anxiety, alternative medicine, writing about safety and health at work and home, and, most recently, how to use cable access television to promote a book.

Dr Kahn has also been involved in a variety of other AMWA activities. She particularly enjoyed working in the areas of membership retention, the core curriculum program, and the book awards program. In 1975, she was awarded an AMWA Fellowship, and in 1982, she received the AMWA President's Award. She served as an AMWA judge for the Margaret Mead Journalism Award for Reporting on Postmenopausal Health, cosponsored by AMWA and Eli Lilly Company, and traveled to Vienna (1997), Berlin (1998), and St. Louis (1999) to make award presentations on behalf of AMWA.

"AMWA really inspired me to obtain my advanced degrees," says Dr Kahn. "When I began attending national conferences I had a BS in journalism. It seemed that everyone around me had higher degrees. So I attended Northwestern University School of Medicine's master's



program in public health and received my MPH degree in 1982. Then, one day, in the early 1990s, my boss suggested that we both enroll in a PhD program. I worked hard and received my PhD in public health in 1997 from the Union Institute and University, Cincinnati, OH. I had an opportunity to choose 2 people for my PhD Advisory Committee who were not on the faculty. I had the good fortune to enlist Betty J. B. Cohen and Patricia Cornett, both long-time AMWA colleagues."

Dr Kahn has written or coauthored a dozen books. Her favorite is *Keeping the Beat: Healthy Aging Through Amateur Chamber Music Playing*. Another book, *Midlife Health: A Woman's Practical Guide to Feeling Good*, won an AMWA book award and has been printed in England as well as in a German translation. She coauthored 3 books on fears and phobias and several on women's health issues.

Her medical writing career included working with the Michael Reese HMO, the American Academy of Dermatology, and health-related organizations before becoming Manager, Community Health Education, at Rush North Shore Medical Center in Skokie, IL, a position she held for 10 years. She established a freelance health care communications consultancy company, Wordscope Associates, and most of her current work focuses on her books. She also has many volunteer activities. She is active in the Rotary Club of Evanston, IL, and is a Director of the International Fellowship of Rotarian Musicians. She is a member of the Evanston Mental Health Board and President of the Evanston Music Club.

Among her other endeavors is producing a cable television show, "Keeping the Beat," which is based on her book of the same name. Dr Kahn received an award for the show in the Mate E. Palmer Communications Contest sponsored by the Illinois Women's Press Association. Excerpts can be seen on her Web site, www.keepingthebeat.com.

"I've known Ada for almost 30 years," says long-time AMWA member Michele Vivirito. "We have worked together on many AMWA projects. When I've needed a speaker on writing books, she's the one I've gone to repeatedly, for chapter meetings, the Asilomar conference, and annual conference roundtables and workshops. Her generosity in sharing her expertise with budding authors is typical Ada."

"For me, big dividends from AMWA participation continue to be job leads, but mostly long-lasting friendships," Dr Kahn says. "Although separated by distance around the country, we keep in touch and happily reconnect at conferences."