

Editorial

Collaborative publishing: the difference between 'gratis journals' and 'open access journals'

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"An old tradition and a new technology have converged to make possible an unprecedented public good. The old tradition is the willingness of scientists and scholars to publish the fruits of their research in scholarly journals without payment, for the sake of inquiry and knowledge. The new technology is the internet. The public good they make possible is the world-wide electronic distribution of the peer-reviewed journal literature and completely free and unrestricted access to it by all scientists, scholars, teachers, students, and other curious minds". That is the beginning paragraph of the Budapest Open Access Initiative, known as the Budapest Declaration.¹ Most likely, no one associated with science, research, or scientific knowledge would be against these statements; 'public good' or 'for the sake of inquiry and knowledge' are altruistic terms that fit perfectly with the research environment. Unfortunately, in some of the subsequent lines, a not-so-encouraging sentence appears: "While the peer-reviewed journal literature should be accessible online without cost to readers, it is not costless to produce". This declaration gave birth to a new type of journal, the open access journals, with a business model based on the statement, "These new journals will not charge subscription or access fees, and will turn to other methods for covering their expenses".¹

Both types of journals, subscription journals and open access journals, have been advocating their excellence and the benefits of their publication systems. One of the BMC journals demonstrated that open access journals were approaching Impact Factors similar to subscription journals.² More recently, a suspiciously simultaneous series of editorials in nursing subscription journals explained the risks associated with publishing in open access journals.³⁻⁸ However, a third option exists. Major subscription journal publishers are now entering the open access market by creating fully open access journals and hybrid open access journals.⁹ The latter consist of providing access to some of the articles published in a subscription journal after receiving compensation from the authors. To categorize all these options, several different terms were created, such as 'gold open access'; 'green open access'; or green, blue, yellow and white archiving policies.¹⁰ This categorization is most likely too complex for a non-specialist.

However, 'open access' does not mean 'free'. It costs money.¹¹ Obviously, open access publishers promote creating institutional funds to support publishing fees in these journals and thereby avoid burdening research projects or individual researchers.¹² Thus, a paradigm shift exists. A few years ago, the not-so-rich institutions or countries could not access scientific journals in which they could publish their research; with this new publishing system, the not-so-rich institutions and countries cannot publish their research, although they can read others' research. Let us be honest: "Medical journals are undergoing a major change in the business model".¹³ The defense of any of these two models is not associated with benefits to researchers, readers, or science in general. We are merely discussing who should pay and how the money should be paid.

This controversy is purposely ignoring the origin of the majority of the traditional scholarly journals: institutional journals created by scientific or professional societies. When many of these journals were created, distribution costs were relevant; consequently, many of them required subscription fees, especially to non-members. With the new technology (the Internet), distribution costs tend to zero, and the other costs are acceptably low for many societies.¹⁴ Indeed, the two most important intervenients in the scholarly publication are not reimbursed at all: authors work for free, and reviewers work for free.

So, why do we insist on keeping this confusing and misleading terminology? First, we should remember that several of the original signatories of the Budapest Open Access Initiative were staff members of business corporations directly involved in publishing journals through this new open access system. Unfortunately, no conflict of interest was ever declared in the declaration. Second, this terminology supports the not-sufficiently-discussed axiom that scholarly publishing should be professionalized by one of these two business models. A different and much simpler terminology might be used: gratis vs paid journals (Figure 1).

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Gratis journals: no one pays	Scholarly journals supported by societies or institutions that work “for the sake of inquiry and knowledge” and make their contents immediately and freely available.	
Paid journals: someone pays	Readers pay	Traditional subscription journals, paid by individuals, institutions or consortia. These journals can keep restricted access either indefinitely or only for a pre-specified period.
	Authors pay	Journals with free access to their contents, previously granted by a fee paid by the authors or by the authors’ institutions.

Figure 1. A clearer terminology for the different publishing systems regarding to payments.

Pharmacy Practice is a gratis journal, for which no one pays any fees or receives any compensation for their work. Pharmacy Practice can exist because of the collaboration with the following groups:

- Authors who submit their contributions without expecting anything else besides publishing their works;
- Peer reviewers who produce reports on the articles received without expecting anything else, thereby keeping the publishing wheel spinning; and
- Editorial and Advisory board members who make decisions and provide comments to oil the publication wheels without receiving any reimbursement.

This arrangement is in agreement with the definition of a different scholarly publishing model: collaborative publishing. Similar to many other institutional journals, Pharmacy Practice fully accomplishes the sentence in the Budapest declaration stating, “The old tradition is the willingness of scientists and scholars to publish the fruits of their research in scholarly journals without payment”. To maintain a clearer terminology, Pharmacy Practice will no longer use the term ‘open access journal’ and will be self-defined as a ‘gratis journal’.

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