



THE SCHOLARLY PUBLISHING  
& ACADEMIC RESOURCES COALITION

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January 6, 2004

The Honorable Elias Zerhouni  
Director  
National Institutes of Health  
9000 Rockville Pike  
Bethesda, MD 20892

Dear Dr. Zerhouni:

I am writing on behalf of leading national organizations of academic, medical, and research libraries in the United States: the American Library Association, the Association of Academic Health Sciences Libraries, the Association of College and Research Libraries, the Association of Research Libraries, the Medical Library Association, and SPARC (the Scholarly Publishing and Academic Resources Coalition). Being aware that the National Institutes of Health is engaged in a review of its policies regarding the dissemination of research conducted with NIH funding, we encourage NIH support of open access to journal articles documenting agency-funded research.

As subscribers to life sciences and medical journals, libraries bear the major overall economic burden of disseminating published research results to scientists, physicians, researchers, students, and the public. In addition, as the key dissemination portals for the nation's wealth of scientific and medical information, libraries are in a unique position to understand the unparalleled opportunities that now exist for global sharing of knowledge.

Unfortunately, the ability of libraries to fulfill their mission is eroded with each passing year as the rise in already-expensive journals outpaces the growth of library budgets. Most libraries have been forced to postpone the purchase of new journal titles, to cancel subscriptions altogether, and to reduce the purchase of books. While library materials budgets grew almost 150 percent between 1986 and 2000, the typical research library was forced to cut journal subscriptions by 7 percent and book purchases by 17 percent. It is evident that the traditional subscription-based model for supporting publication costs is becoming increasingly inadequate to serve the needs of science and medicine.

Although the potential of the Internet to reduce costs and expand dissemination was widely anticipated, experience has shown that vested publishing interests – immune from normal market forces because of their control of “must have” content – have blocked the realization of these potential benefits. This situation impairs scientific investigation and impedes the fullest sharing and application of research findings.

It is our belief that a growing knowledge economy depends as much, if not more, on the knowledge distribution power of the system as on its knowledge production power. Hence, it is essential to provide cost-effective access to and dissemination of scientific information in support of research and its economic and social applications. But the subscription-based journal model currently prevalent no longer maximizes access to research material. Nor is it economically sustainable.

After years of active engagement in market-based experiments aimed at introducing competitive forces to achieve expanded dissemination of research, our organizations have concluded that open-access business models are a highly promising means of addressing the fundamental needs of science and medicine in a digital age. Numerous publications have adopted open access and public recognition of the benefits of open access is growing rapidly. The best-known open-access journals are *PLoS Biology* and the publications of BioMed Central, but there are already hundreds of others in a range of fields (see *Directory of Open Access Journals*, [www.doaj.org](http://www.doaj.org)).

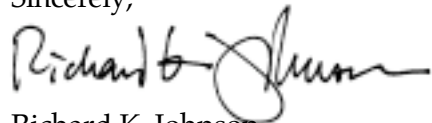
Despite the promise of open access, current ambiguity surrounding the issue of who will pay for the cost of publication makes the move to open access a higher risk than is necessary for journal publishers. Resolution of this issue may be a precondition of a broader move to open access and the realization of its benefits.

We applaud the efforts of the National Library of Medicine to expand access to journal literature. PubMed and PubMed Central, for example, are contributions of great importance, and usage of these national treasures has demonstrated the demand for and potential benefits of barrier-free access to quality-validated research. Likewise, NIH's recent Statement on Sharing Research Data is a valuable recognition of the importance of enhancing the value of NIH's investments by ensuring accessibility.

However, the opportunity to maximize U.S. taxpayers' return on their investment in NIH will not be fully realized until the power of the Internet and corresponding new financial models are embraced. We encourage NIH to unleash this potential by earmarking a portion of NIH grant funds to be used only for open-access publication and recommending to grantees that they avail themselves of this option. Such a step would encourage further development of open-access publications, benefiting scientific discovery and public health.

We would welcome an opportunity for leaders of the academic and research library community to meet with you to discuss these vital issues.

Sincerely,



Richard K. Johnson  
Director, SPARC

cc: Donald A.B. Lindberg, Director, National Library of Medicine  
Lana Skirboll, Deputy Director for Science Policy, National Institutes of Health  
Keith Fiels, Executive Director, American Library Association  
Shirley Bishop, Executive Director, Association of Academic Health Sciences Libraries  
Mary Ellen Davis, Executive Director, Association of College and Research Libraries  
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