

Open Access: A Global Conversation

MODERATOR:

Jennifer Deyton

Senior Partner
J&J Editorial, LLC
Cary, North Carolina

SPEAKERS:

Chi Wai (Rick) Lee

General Manager
World Scientific Publishing
Singapore, Singapore

Glenn Hampson

Program Director
Open Scholarship Initiative
Seattle, Washington

Margaret (Peggy) Perkins

Director of Manuscript Editing
New England Journal of Medicine
Boston, Massachusetts

Magdalena Skipper

Editor in Chief
Springer Nature
London, UK

Mandip Aujla

Senior Editor
The Lancet Global Health
Danvers, Massachusetts

Ana Marusic

Professor, Department Chair
University of Split School of
Medicine
Split, Croatia

REPORTER:

Judy Connors

Do It Write Editorial, LLC

At last year's Annual Meeting, CSE offered a session, as well as a webinar in 2020, covering the topic of Open Access (OA) from a global perspective. For the 2021 meeting, CSE convened a panel of speakers from these sessions, and a few additional special guests, for an updated discussion about OA's challenges and practical application for publishers and societies globally. With perspectives ranging from large commercial publishers to prestigious societies from 5 countries, the discussion, framed by the global pandemic, vaccine discovery, climate change, and food insecurity, focused on why the world needs science today more than ever.

Glenn Hampson, Program Director of the Open Scholarship Initiative, opened with the theory that "Science is based on sharing knowledge and without that sharing there is no science. The question for today is how to share findings that will create the longest benefit for research and society." OA is instrumental for this knowledge sharing, he continued, and is part of a long-time movement with government-funded research making significant contributions to science; but, because of the different approaches to this globally, there is no coordination toward common goals, and a lack of leadership on the worldwide stage has prevented universal acceptance of open sharing. The movement is driven by the theory that open research is for the public good, but the reality is that there are many barriers to achieving a wide-reaching agreement. There are no one-size-fits-all solutions,

and the remaining question is what will research sharing look like in the future. The answer depends on what future we are talking about and who we are talking to.

Everyone agrees that the solution must work for research and that reaching a common purpose has always been critical in scientific discovery. But, not everyone agrees on how to achieve that. This panel discussed the challenges facing a global OA research publication model and potential routes for getting there.

Finding Common Goals

The difficulty, according to Margaret Perkins of *The New England Journal of Medicine (NEJM)*, is that there are so many different approaches given the complex ecosystem of scholarly research. "Recognizing that identifying common goals in a complex system is larger than one specific approach is important and the most critical workaround for different perspectives," she says. "Then let the best solutions evolve from that."

Perkins discussed *NEJM* and raised the question about where it stands in the overall ecosystem. Is it representative of common goals or an outlier? Where do they fit? "We appear as a public access journal—on our website all research is available without cost after 6 months regardless of funding; 98% of our content is freely available; we participate in Hinari; public health articles are always free and we are compliant with UNESCO OA. But," Perkins continues, "we are also a subscription journal, which is odd for OA." How do they support their position in relation to the ecosystem? "Currently, we have a 5% acceptance rate and our goal is to not fit into a model where all content is readily available to everyone but a hybrid type of publication."

Researcher Concerns

Concerns of young professionals in the "publish or perish" environment were presented by Rick Lee of World Scientific Publishing in Singapore. "In a culture where downloads and citations quantify research impact, research being widely accessible and distributed is the key to those metrics so the researchers look good and their research impact is being recognized," Lee states. Young professionals' promotions are often tied to their publishing record, but article publication charges (APCs) are a block sometimes, Lee believes. "More senior researchers don't have the same concerns, so do they think it is as important to have OA as the younger ones?"

OA is not always doable and can also create a burden on the researcher when considering large, complex data sets,

CONTINUED

and how to make them accessible without barriers to full use. Many researchers look at the practicality of doing this and, when coupled with the financial considerations, have to really examine where and how to publish. Open research is important, but we need to develop open tools and processes that researchers want, will use, and that consider their needs and concerns.

Manage Unintended Consequences

Our evolving open models are not containing costs. Is this okay? Reducing costs was an original driver of the move to open but are we trading a bad barrier for a worse one? The APC solution is becoming calcified, but APCs for top-tier journals are no longer affordable for most of the world. What does this mean long-term? Are we heading down the road of scientific haves and have-nots?

Policy/regulatory conflict is increasing. Because we aren't working together on developing globally workable open solutions, countries are creating their own solutions. For example, General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) is currently conflicting with open data requirements and stalling major science research around the world. Soon, we'll have an ideologically based UNESCO open science policy that may paint science research into a corner. Ana Marusic of University of Split Medical School in Croatia suggests GDPR could be regulated at country levels, which would benefit researchers as they consider participants and what happens with their personal data.

All speakers agreed that open policies are having unintended consequences. It is critical that we don't dismiss these in our pursuit of open solutions that we "feel" are right.

Anticipate a Fractured Solution

The panel started with the question that if we aren't working together, are we creating a lot of different solutions and, therefore, not one?

Mandip Aujla of *Lancet Global Health*, an OA journal that publishes global health research, says that APCs are difficult for noneconomically advanced countries that have different research infrastructures, and he believes that the cost to publish in an internationally renowned journal is a burden and a barrier to publishing for these countries. Watson agrees: "Most authors in southern areas pay their own APC while in the U.S./EU most are paid by institutions, thus magnifying inequities in the current system; hopefully, solutions that are more equitable will emerge from this discussion." From low- and medium-income countries, 60% of APCs are paid out of pocket by the authors. Lee points

out "that an APC of USD\$2,000 could be a monthly salary for some of these researchers."

Lack of funding to cover fees is not the only challenge. Often authors from these countries (particularly those that meet Hinari standards) are not aware of available help from publishers. Communication with the communities that will benefit from this type of funding is critical. Obtaining assistance is also hard due to language barriers. Also, OA may not be the best way to publish. In China, for example, if an APC is more than USD\$3,000 equivalent, researchers need permission to even publish it. "Open Access is not quite as important for different areas of research and cultural ways of thinking," Aujla concludes.

Improve Access, Equity, and Diversity

The scientific community really is all in this together and should reach for the same goals. The first step is charting a path to identify commonalities and figure out how to work together. Improving access is the key driver of open policies. As open evolves, will access improve for some or all? Will equity and diversity also improve or get worse? These are questions that remain unanswered.

If we follow our current open policy path, science will continue to primarily focus on (and fund, and benefit) only the most privileged researchers, areas of research, universities, and countries. Our current open reforms are tailored for wealthy countries, and will mostly make their research more visible at the cost of less visibility for other researchers' work from less economically advantaged countries.

To raise visibility for non-English published journals, we need better indexing for regional journals, many of which are published in local languages. So far, this visibility has remained poor.

The public need for information must be met in a realistic, demand-driven, and sustainable way. All panelists agreed there are no practical solutions for making everything available to everyone as a default objective.

What other actions would help? Global infrastructure efforts? National subscription plans (like India's)? Improved public access (like the U.S.)? More development requires more conversations on a worldwide basis where all countries and economies can bring their perspectives and experiences to the discussion. Journals and publishers need to do this, too, including a diversity of editors, authors, and reviewers.

As the year and discussion unfold, many questions remain unanswered but one thing is clear: We are a long way from reaching a sustainable, achievable, equitable OA model for scientific publishing.