

What is the future of research
publishing?

Three Editors and a Funeral?

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Journal Citation Reports®

HELP

2004 JCR Social Science

Journal Summary List [Journal Title C](#)

subject categories PUBLIC, ENVIRONMENTAL & OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH VIEW CATEGORY SUMMARY LIST

Impact Factor SORT AGAIN

20 (of 60)

Navigation icons: back, forward, search, etc.

Page

UPDATE MARKED LIST

Ranking is based on your journal and sort selections.

Rank	Rank	Abbreviated Journal Title <i>(linked to journal information)</i>	ISSN	Total Cites	Impact Factor	Immediacy Index	Articles	Cited Half-life
1	1	ANNU REV PUBL HEALTH	0163-7525	1595	4.293	0.500	24	7.1
2	2	AM J PUBLIC HEALTH	0090-0036	17066	3.241	0.723	303	8.1
3	3	TOB CONTROL	0964-4563	1887	3.159	0.833	90	4.4
4	4	PSYCHIAT SERV	1075-2730	3496	2.279	0.469	143	4.7
5	5	SOC SCI MED	0277-9536	12756	2.088	0.413	419	7.9
6	6	PSYCHOL HEALTH	0887-0446	978	1.683	0.240	50	6.4
7	7	AM J HEALTH PROMOT	0890-1171	1217	1.671	0.391	46	7.3
8	8	J AM COLL HEALTH	0744-8481	733	1.625	0.103	29	6.3
9	9	AUST NZ J PUBL HEAL	1326-0200	1240	1.614	0.169	77	5.0

Tobacco Control (BMJ Publishing Group)

- Circa 1400 subscribers (including libraries)
- 6000 visitors/week to website
- Everything >12 months old free to all
- All content free to all LDC ISP email domains
- 6 issues/year approx 8-10 orig. articles + commentaries, editorials, debates, letters etc
- 420 submissions/year, & increasing (why?)
- Thus: 48-60 articles/year (11-14% can be published.)



Let's readily concede open access superiority in ...

- Speed of publication (although how often does this really matter? & when it does, rapid publication is possible)
- That open access has driven many reforms in reader pays journals (eg: free access to archives, rapid publication of important papers)



Downsides of open-access

- Recipe for open sesame to previously unpublishable mediocrity
- “Reviewer abuse”: opens floodgates to exploit & burn goodwill in reviewers
- Publication bias toward big pharma & big institutional sponsored research



1. Open sesame to mediocrity

- Indisputable that there are unhappy authors (rejection, delay)
- But is important research being rejected?
- On-line rapid publication possible in 7-10 days
- What is the virtue of ever-populating the internet with studies that ever-fewer want to read or cite?



Words used by 41 doctors to describe their information supply (source:Smith R)

- Impossible Impossible Impossible
Impossible Impossible Impossible
- Overwhelming Overwhelming
Overwhelming Overwhelming
Overwhelming Overwhelming
- Difficult Difficult Difficult Difficult
- Daunting Daunting Daunting
- Pissed off
- Choked
- Depressed
- Despairing
- Worrisome
- Saturation
- Vast
- Help
- Exhausted
- Frustrated
- Time consuming
- Dreadful
- Awesome
- Struggle
- Mindboggling
- Unrealistic
- Stress
- Challenging
- Guilt provoking





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Information paradox



- “Water, water, everywhere, nor any drop to drink”
- The Rime of the Ancient Mariner



Journals have vital roles to play in

- Raising study quality
- Providing reputational assurance of quality
- One-stop shop for many busy people
- Adding value via editorials, commentaries, debates, ABCs, letters, rapid responses &c



BioMed Central

- Currently charges £330-£950 per article published
- In 2006 will charge £750
- Approx 80% paid by institutions, not individuals
- 60% acceptance rate
- Source: Pritpal Tamber, Medical Editor BMC



2. Reviewer abuse

- Open-access journals are peer reviewed
- TC's reviewer refusal rate since 2002 = 29% (ie: requests after culling true rubbish)
- Not uncommon to have circa 10 refusals for some papers
- Will open access overwhelm peer reviewing goodwill?
- Treats reviewing as a free good (trades on mutual *noblese oblige*)



Financial incentives of journals

- **Reader pays**
- Readers want quality: high incentive for publishers to reject sub-standard, so what, me-too papers
- **Author pays**
- Financial incentive for publisher to accept as much as possible?



3. Publication bias

- Open-access risks being driven by a mercantile agenda



Cho and Bero, 1996

	Sponsorship	
	Drug company (n = 40)	Not Drug company (n = 112)
Favorable	39 (98%)	89 (79%)
Not favorable	1 (2%)	23 (21%)



EDITORIAL.....

The fate of papers rejected from *Tobacco Control*

Rejecting papers is among the hardest tasks that editors must perform. We have strict page limits of 72 pages per issue and typically publish 11 original articles per issue—66 a year. We would like to publish more but our subscriber base and financial situation currently precludes this. Competition to get published is therefore tough. Of the 214 papers submitted to the journal in 2005 (as at 11 August) where decisions have been made, we have rejected 150 (69.7%), with 127 (59% of all decisions) being rejected before review. As authors ourselves, we know how disappointing a rejection can be. But it need not be the end of the road.

In July 2005, we searched the PubMed database for all 286 papers rejected by *Tobacco Control* between

March 2002 and December 2003. We searched by the first author's name and examined all papers with identical or similar titles to those submitted to *Tobacco Control*. Ninety (31.4%) papers had been published in one of 59 different PubMed indexed journals. *Preventive Medicine* (7), *Nicotine and Tobacco Research* (6), and *the European Journal of Public Health* were published most. The vast majority (80%) of the papers we were unable to publish were published by other international journals, with the remainder being homes in national or regional journals. In all but six cases, the papers were published in journals with lower impact factors than *Tobacco Control's* (3.1 in 2004).

In recent months we have been receiving an increasing number of

emails where authors ask for a preliminary opinion, before submission, about a paper's likelihood of being accepted. The editors of *Tobacco Control* perform their editorial duties on a part time basis on top of their professional work. We receive over 400 manuscripts a year, all of which must be read. We simply do not have the time to also read potential or draft manuscripts or to give authors preliminary assessments.

The average number of days we take to reach a first decision has fallen from 37.6 days in 2002 to 13.7 days in 2005. The average number of days from submission to publication has fallen from 214.3 days to 110 days in the same period.

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31% of rejected papers published elsewhere within 4 years



NIH edict

- Compliance with NIH depositing is very low (single digit percentages)
- How many of those leading scientists who advocated for open access are in fact sending their work there?
- Unless author-pays is universally implemented, situation where authors will have to pay + will have to pay for access to traditional journals



Conclusion

- Open access publishing will become ever “popular” but will it lose credibility because of:
- mercantilist publishing bias
- erosion of confidence in quality via reviewer overload revolt
- consequent preservation of quality/best papers reputations of user-pays journals
- reader thirst for quality & guidance

