

## Exploring new ways of publishing: a library-faculty partnership

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### INTRODUCTION

A number of perspectives exist in response to the "crisis in scholarly communication," particularly in the sciences. This crisis represents the financial pressure of the increasing number of published journals coupled with subscription inflation rates exceeding 10% each year. Until recently, it was largely a "library problem," but university provosts and other administrators have become sensitized to the issue as librarians request more funds to support the costs. Beyond protesting the journal cuts made by their libraries, faculty have remained for the most part unaware of broader issues, such as the consequence of signing away their intellectual property rights to the journals in which they publish. With the advent of electronic publishing, the issues have become even more complex [1, 2].

Over the past five years, a number of initiatives have emerged to address the process and economics of the current system of scholarly communication and to broaden the discussion from a library problem to one that involves the entire academic community [3]. In 1998, the Association of Research Libraries (ARL) began the Scholarly Publishing and Academic Resources Coalition (SPARC), "a world-wide alliance of research institutions, librarians, and organizations that encourages competition in the scholarly communications

market" [4]. In 2000, ARL followed SPARC with a process to educate faculty about new publishing paradigms called *Create Change*, which "seeks to address the crisis in scholarly communication by helping scholars regain control of the scholarly communication system" [5].

### CREATING CHANGE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

In 1998, the University of Virginia (UVa) began a process to educate faculty about these issues through presentations at library committee and faculty senate meetings [6]. While the discussions were valuable, no real momentum was gained, primarily because, at that point, no viable alternative to traditional publishing yet existed. By 2002, there *were* alternatives, at least in biomedicine—PubMed Central and BioMed Central [7]. This prompted the UVa Claude Moore Health Sciences Library (CMHSL) to make a renewed effort focusing on School of Medicine faculty.

In February 2002, the CMHSL director gave a presentation titled "Publish, Perish and Problems with the Status Quo" at a retreat for faculty of the School of Medicine. She described the publication cycle, the evolution of scientific publishing, the emergence of new models, and the drivers of and the barriers to change. She also spoke to faculty at the retreat poster session regarding reaction to "electronic-only" publishing in nontraditional systems. BioMed Central (BMC), an independent publishing house committed to providing immediate free electronic access to peer-reviewed biomedical research, was used as an example to frame the discussion. A number of advantages to publishing in BMC were described. The peer-review process is conducted online in a timely fashion. Accepted articles receive immediate citation in PubMed, permitting new scientific discoveries to be disseminated rapidly worldwide, at no charge to readers. Articles are permanently archived in the National Library of Medicine's PubMed Central. Finally, authors retain the copyright of their work, unlike traditional publishers who generally hold the copyright and thus often restrict subsequent use, even by authors.

Following the retreat, the CMHSL prepared a newsletter article [8] and a Website with background information and sent an email message to all medical faculty soliciting their opinions. The intent was to explore with them the desirability and feasibility of participating in an evolving model of scholarly communication that features scientist-controlled, peer-reviewed submission to an electronic journal and online archive rather than the traditional publisher-controlled model. The suggestion was that authors bypass the traditional publisher and try something new. The primary question posed was: would medical faculty be interested in publishing their research in BioMed Central and participating in the evolving nature of scientific communication?

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## FACULTY REACTION

The relatively negative concerns fell into two main categories: first, credibility, capability, and viability of BioMed Central as a company; and second, skepticism about how promotion and tenure committees and granting agencies would react to publications in BMC, especially before the peer-review process is proved to be credible, articles are cited, and impact factors are generated. On the positive side, some faculty felt that electronic publishing would enhance communication between readers and authors by providing better and more rapid feedback about not only who is citing the research, but also who is reading it.

Several faculty members expressed interest in exploring this topic further, including some who were already peer reviewers on BMC journals or had been asked to submit articles. One of the potential barriers to publishing in BMC was the \$500 fee if the article is accepted after peer review. While a number of established print journals assess page charges, the CMHSL wanted to find ways to reduce this barrier. BMC offers institutional licenses (for UVA's size, it was \$4,500 a year) that permit unlimited accepted papers at no charge to the authors. The CMHSL's goal was to find enough interest among UVA faculty to publish enough papers to at least break even on the first year's license.

Upon learning that two clinicians in the Department of Neurology were submitting a paper to BMC, the CMHSL offered to pay the \$500 fee in return for their reflecting on their experience with this article and speaking about it to their colleagues. On April 23, 2002, the two clinicians, one a tenured professor and one a senior resident, jointly submitted a case report [9] to BMC Neurology. The submission process was straightforward—a simple upload of a word processing document. Turnaround time for review and revision was approximately two weeks, and the reviewers' comments were readily addressed. A short unanticipated delay was required to address concerns about the need for an informed consent document to publish this case report. The editors were receptive to meaningful discussion and ultimately agreed to waive this document due to unique aspects of the clinical presentation. Final acceptance and publication occurred on June 26, 2002.

Why were these two clinicians interested in trying this new way of publishing? For the senior resident, it provided an opportunity for him to begin to develop a publication portfolio in a timely manner in a framework most familiar to him—a case report that did not take a lot of time to prepare but which he felt was worth sharing with colleagues. He would have been somewhat less motivated to prepare such a report for a traditional print journal with its lengthy publication cycle. To him, peer review was important as was immediate citation in PubMed and archiving in PubMed Central. However, in the future, as he pursues his clinical investigation career, he admits he would try to publish his first "big research study" in a more prestigious, traditional journal.

The senior faculty member saw other relevant aspects. With little academic pressure to publish at this stage of his career, especially as an academic clinician and not as an investigator, the potential "risk" of publishing in a journal with scant track record or impact value was less meaningful. As a relatively new journal with a goal of rapid publication, submitting to a BMC journal was seen as an opportunity to take advantage of perhaps less competitive standards for acceptance compared with more high-profile journals, yet the article would still have the merits of peer-review and PubMed citation. These facts motivated him to encourage residents and junior faculty to consider BMC as a good resource for them to begin to be recognized for their work in a timely and straightforward way. In an environment of clinical care, where time for research is limited, access to a publisher like BMC provides a good outlet for residents eager to get published in a peer-review process.

## NEXT STEPS

In September 2002, the CMHSL invested in an institutional license for BioMed Central, permitting all faculty and students at UVA to submit articles at no charge to them. A number of institutions have likewise invested—as of November 2002, there were forty-nine BMC institutional members, of which twenty-one were in the United States [10]. A promotional campaign was begun to inform medical, nursing, and science faculty at UVA about BMC. At the suggestion of the medical school dean, this campaign began with a letter from the CMHSL director to all department chairs, and subsequently the faculty, pointing out both the perceived advantages and disadvantages of publishing in a new way. The letter included the following advisory:

Choosing to publish in BMC is an individual decision and should be based on a clear understanding of the advantages and disadvantages it may present to your career development. Before you make the decision, you should seek out the advice of your department chair, mentor, or other senior colleague.

As of November 2002, at least one additional faculty member has submitted an article to a BMC journal for review. The educational campaign will continue throughout the year with medical and nursing faculty and with the promotion and tenure committee in the medical school. UVA's science and engineering libraries have likewise begun to inform their faculty about BMC. In September 2003, the CMHSL will evaluate the impact of its education campaign and investment in a BMC institutional license to determine how best to proceed into the future.

## CONCLUSIONS

An author must make many decisions in submitting an article for publication, and the landscape has become even more complex with the advent of electronic publishing [11]. Electronic-only publishing is a new

idea being introduced to a system of scholarly communication that has worked well for decades, if not centuries. We are at the very early stages of the introduction of a new idea. Librarians can have a key role in educating faculty about the new publishing paradigms and working with their universities to reduce the barriers and provide incentives for those willing to "create change."

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### **Librarians as contributing authors to Patient Education and Preventive Medicine: a collaborative project of the Consumer Health Committee of the Georgia Health Sciences Library Association\***

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## BACKGROUND

In librarianship, as in life in general, unique opportunities can present themselves at any time in any place. This was the case when a group of health sciences librarians were invited to author a portion of a patient-education textbook through a chance encounter at a state medical meeting.

In 1999, one of the authors attended the annual conference of the Georgia Academy of Family Physicians

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\* Based on a poster presented at MLA 2001, the 101st Annual Meeting, Medical Library Association, Orlando, Florida, May 27-29, 2001; and at the Triple-Chapter Meeting of the Medical Library Association, New Orleans, Louisiana; October 27, 2001.

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