

## Paying for publication

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This year the *Journal of Medical Screening* is conducting a publication experiment. Authors of papers accepted for publication in the journal will be offered the opportunity to choose between two options regarding online access to their published paper: (1) the traditional Journal-pays approach, in which members of the Medical Screening Society and subscribers to the *Journal of Medical Screening* have free online access to the paper, but other readers pay to download the paper from the Journal website, or (2) a new author-pays approach, in which authors can pay a fee to enable their paper to be freely accessible online. The fee for Society members and members of subscribing organizations will be £500 per paper, and £1250 for others.

As the *Journal* is relatively specialized, with a small subscription base, the Journal-pays option (option 1) may restrict public access to the paper because of the cost and delay in obtaining a copy. If the author, who may often be able to pay the publication fee from their research grant or institution, would like free open access, they can have this under the author-pays option (option 2). Under this option, the paper will also be registered on PubMed Central.

There has been ongoing debate over the merits of these two approaches. Public bodies such as the National Institutes of Health in the USA and the Medical Research Council in the UK are favouring the author-pays method because the cost need not be great in relation to the total costs of the research, and online access is free and open to all readers. It harnesses the value of internet access.

Our plan, therefore, is to adopt a hybrid approach based on using both methods together. It has the pragmatic appeal of avoiding a debate over which is preferable by simply trying both together, and seeing what emerges.

The choice between the two options will be made by the author only after the paper has been accepted, avoiding any possible conflict of interest. Acceptance of a paper is not linked to any knowledge of which option the authors will choose. The fact that a paper is freely accessible online to everyone will be identified in the paper and online journal publication.

We are also making all *Journal* papers published more than two years previously freely accessible online, so the difference between the two approaches is that with the author-pays option, all readers have immediate open access to papers; otherwise, they have to wait two years, during which time they pay to view the paper.

Ultimately, someone has to pay to receive, assess, organize the review process and publish papers. Traditionally, the journal has paid for this from its income obtained from subscribers and readers, and this has been shown to be an economically sustainable approach. Whether the author-pays option will be sustainable is uncertain. If it can be, there are undoubted benefits in making research more readily available to a wider readership.

We will review our publication payment policy in the light of what we learn, and from any comments we receive, all of which will be welcome.

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Editor

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