

News Notes

News Notes are taken from the EASE Journal Blog (<http://ese-bookshelf.blogspot.com>), which has clickable links to internet sources. Please email items for inclusion to Richard Hurley (rhurley@bmj.com), with "News Notes" as the subject.

Many Chinese trials flawed

The design of more than 90% of 2235 randomised controlled trials published in Chinese medical journals was flawed, concludes a review (*Trials* 2009;10:46). Researchers trawled a Chinese national database for studies of 20 common diseases published between 1994 and 2005. Only 207 of the studies used accepted randomisation methods. Data from falsely reported trials can mislead healthcare providers, consumers, and policy makers. In a recent *Lancet* article (2009;373:2091-3), Jia He and colleagues at the Second Military Medical University in Shanghai said, "Over the past 20 years biomedical articles authored and published by Chinese researchers have improved greatly in quality". (*BMJ* 2009;339:b2729)

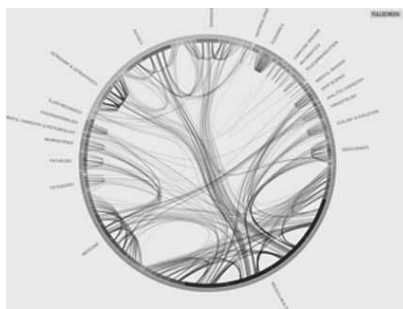
Google affects the brain

The act of searching with Google changes patterns of cognition, research has shown. An exploratory study of people aged 55-76 found that internet searching may engage neural circuitry that is not activated while reading text pages, in people with prior internet search experience. The researchers used functional magnetic resonance imaging of the brain to compare activity in net savvy and net naive users. The net-savvy group had more signal intensity in additional regions controlling decision making, complex reasoning, and vision. More research is needed, particularly in younger web users. (*American Journal of Geriatric Psychiatry* 2009;17:116-26.)

Publisher censors sexuality article

Taylor and Francis has prevented

an article on pederasty from being published in the *Journal of Homosexuality*, blogged Harvey Marcovitch on bmj.com (tinyurl.com/lcnsv). The article had been accepted before the publisher acquired the journal. Advance online publication of the abstract of the article caused uproar after a conservative US pressure group made "the baseless accusation that [the author] was . . . advocating sex with children," according to an editor. In compromise the author was invited to revise the article for a theme issue, but Taylor and Francis, whose journals belong to the Committee on Publication Ethics, then decided against publication.



Beauty in information flow

As researchers use journals to build knowledge they leave "a latticework of citations, from which we can reconstruct the geography of scientific thought," say developers at the Eigenfactor Project (www.eigenfactor.com). And they display this geography in appealing ways—for example, the many connections between journals and disciplines as a circle crisscrossed with curves (see tinyurl.com/bk7fey). The project is a non-commercial academic research project sponsored by the University of Washington. It aims to use advances in network analysis and information theory to rank journals' influence and to map their use in research.

Help for developing-world authors

Free editorial feedback for authors in the developing world is being provided by students from leading academic institutions in Canada, Europe, and the United States,

reports Naomi Antony on SciDev. Net. SciEdit (www.jyi.org/sciedit) adapts texts in accordance with the editorial standards of journals such as *Nature*. SciEdit is the brainchild of the *Journal of Young Investigators*, a student led, peer reviewed journal for undergraduates, with members from more than 30 academic institutions including the All India Institute of Medical Sciences. Most international scientific journals are written in English, making it difficult for non-native English speaking scientists to compete, says Justin Chakma, cofounder of SciEdit. (tinyurl.com/mkt84e)

Wiki or perish

Contributors to a section on descriptions of families of RNA molecules in the journal *RNA Biology* are required to submit also a Wikipedia page that summarises their work. The journal will peer review the page before publishing it in Wikipedia. The Wikipedia-publishing initiative is a collaboration between the journal and the consortium that produces the Rfam database of RNA families, which contains information about non-coding RNA families and other structured RNA elements. (www.nature.com, 16 Dec 2008, "Wikipedia or perish")

A pedant and proud

"Pedant is not a term I choose, but nor is it one that I any longer regard as the insult that is generally intended," writes Oliver Kamm, in an introduction to his new column on the English language in the *Times*. The column will prescribe usage because "language needs its protectors because it is not infinitely malleable," he says. "Rapid change causes much of the literature of the past to become obscure to modern readers. A society with a diminished sense of its literary inheritance is inevitably coarsened. The same goes for its understanding of history." (www.timesonline.com, 26 Jun 2009, "Say it loud—I'm a pedant and I'm proud")

Journal's integrity questioned

An academic has branded the Indian journal *Scientific Medicine* a “scam,” according to reports in the *BMJ*. A publicity email sent by a student representative wrongly listed Richard Smith, former *BMJ* editor, Gavin Yamey, a senior editor at *PLoS Medicine*, and others, as members of the editorial board. The student says that he tried to correct this mistake, but the email had already been circulated further. *Scientific Medicine* says that one of its aims is to give students in developing countries the opportunity to learn about medical research and the publication process—for which it charges them \$100. (*BMJ* 2009;338:b735 and b804)

Court silences science writer

The science writer and broadcaster Simon Singh is being sued for libel in the UK courts by the British Chiropractic Association. Singh wrote an article on 19 April 2008 in the *Guardian* that criticised claims made by chiropractors about the efficacy of spinal manipulation for childhood conditions such as asthma, colic, and ear infections, citing a lack of evidence. He also complained that the association “happily promotes bogus treatments.” In a preliminary hearing the judge ruled that Singh's words imply conscious dishonesty and that they amount to a statement of fact rather than comment. English libel law demands that to win the case Singh will effectively have to prove that the association recklessly promotes chiropractic. The charity Sense About Science has a campaign to keep libel laws out of science (www.senseaboutscience.org.uk/freedebate). More than 100 prominent supporters, including David King, former chief scientific adviser to the UK government, call for an urgent review of English libel law in a statement. (*BMJ* 2009;338:b2254)

The end for embargoes?

Embargoes turn journalists into propagandists for scientists and academic journals and reduce science to an artificial series of “eureka moments,” according to Vincent Kiernan, associate dean at

Georgetown University, speaking at the World Conference of Science Journalists, according to blogs. nature.com. Richard Horton, editor of the *Lancet*, said, “You've sold your soul to publicity masquerading as science.” Many journalists think that embargoes ensure that they don't miss a story and have time to report. Losing the system would force editors to employ reporters who understand science rather than simply regurgitate weekly press releases, Horton concluded. Horton suggested a randomised trial in the *Lancet* to see if embargoed papers get more and better coverage in the lay press. (tinyurl.com/mlklqj)



Editors must cover climate change

That editors must do more to encourage articles about climate change was a recurring theme at the World Conference of Science Journalists, according to Sian Lewis on SciDev.Net. The problem is that climate change is “tomorrow's story, or next year's—but not today's.” International climate talks, such as the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change conference of parties and the negotiations planned in Copenhagen, can be used as hooks for articles on global warming, a delegate suggested. Another ruse is to use local events to bring up related issues of climate change. “Humanise it,” was the advice from the *Guardian's* Damien Harrington. (tinyurl.com/kr3heg)

Millionth word was nonsense

“The biggest load of chicken droppings” is how the linguist and academic David Crystal (tinyurl.com/ctvakt) described claims that

the English language would get its millionth word at 10.22 am on 10 June, on the BBC programme *Newsnight*. The Global Language Monitor (www.languagemonitor.com) announced in June that “Web 2.0” had become the millionth English word or phrase to enter the language. Crystal blogs, “All it means is that the algorithm they've been using to track English words has finally reached a million.” He considered technical dictionaries: “There are over a million insects in the world, for example, and English presumably has words for most of them—even if several are Latin loan words.”

Drug company made journal

Merck paid Elsevier an undisclosed sum to produce several volumes of the *Australasian Journal of Bone and Joint Medicine*, which might be mistaken for a peer reviewed journal, *The Scientist* reports. However, it contained only reprinted articles that seemed to act solely as marketing tools, with no disclosure of company sponsorship. The journal was not indexed in Medline and carried advertisements for the Merck drugs Fosamax and Vioxx. A spokesperson for Elsevier told *The Scientist*, “I wish there was greater disclosure that it was a sponsored journal.” (www.thescientist.com, 30 Apr 2009, “Merck published fake journal”)

Web 2.0 opens conferences

Social networking is changing behaviour among conference attendees, *Nature* reports. Delegates can informally discuss presentations as they occur, with each other and with outside parties. Some see this collaboration as the way forward. Others think that the blurring of the line between journalists and researchers may make scientists reluctant to present unpublished data. Some conference organizers have banned digital photography in talks and poster sessions and some consider bloggers to be members of the media and subject them to reporting restrictions. In an accompanying editorial, *Nature* says that organizers must decide whether meetings are completely open or “off

the record" (*Nature* 2009;459:1050-1, doi:10.1038/4591050a and 2009;460:152, doi:10.1038/460152a)

Seminal *Nature* editor dies

John Maddox, editor of *Nature* from 1966 to 1973 and again from 1980 to 1995, died on 12 April 2009. During his first stint he laid the foundations for *Nature* as it is today. He replaced cronyism with an impartial system of peer review, but he liked to say that the 1953 paper on the structure of DNA would never have passed peer review. He also established a strong tradition of journalism in *Nature*, and he established the voice of *Nature* in unsigned editorials, although the voice was often unmistakably his own. (*Nature* 2009;458:807, doi:10.1038/458807a)

Train for open access

The Open Access Scholarly Information Sourcebook (www.openoasis.org) provides authoritative online training for anyone who wishes to provide open access to their research publications. It covers the concept, principles, advantages, approaches, and means to achieving open access. The project wants more trainers and centres of expertise worldwide, to share resources and best practice, and to demonstrate and record successful outcomes around the world. The sourcebook has information for researchers, librarians, and repository managers. The site highlights developments and initiatives from around the world, with links to diverse additional resources and case studies.

Gifts for good reviews

The publishing company Elsevier has confirmed that it was a mistake to offer \$25 Amazon gift cards to academics contributing to the textbook *Clinical Psychology* to encourage them to post favourable reviews. An email sent by the company offered to pay them for positive online reviews. A spokesman for Elsevier said that the email did not reflect company policy and said that it had been a "mistake". He said,

"Encouraging interested parties to post book reviews isn't outside the norm in scholarly publishing . . . But in all instances the request should be unbiased." (*BMJ* 2009;339:b2841, doi:10.1136/bmj.b2841)

Twitter meets arXiv

"Tweprints" will eventually begin to display the most talked about scientific papers using the largest open collection of online papers available (arXiv) and the most prolific and popular open social networking tool (Twitter), hopes its creator Robert Simpson at Cardiff University. For a tweet (a post of up to 140 characters) to be detected it must include the word "arxiv" and the eight digit arXiv paper identifier (for example, 0906.1234). ArXiv links hidden within short URLs from tinyurl.com and is.gd are also picked up. Eight tweets a day on average are detected. You can see the latest detected tweets at <http://orbitingfrog.com/arxiv>.



Turkey censors evolution articles

The Turkish government has provoked outrage by censoring magazine articles on the life and work of Charles Darwin, *Nature* reports. The article was dropped from the March issue of the popular science magazine *Bilim ve Teknik* (Science and Technology; www.biltek.tubitak.gov.tr). The magazine is published by the Turkish government's research funding and science management organization, Tübitak. A planned cover picture of Darwin was switched for an illustration relating to global warming. The editor, Çiğdem Atakuman, has been removed from her post. The claims have fuelled

speculation that the Islamic-oriented government in Turkey wants to increase the role of religion and promote Muslim creationism. The website of the evolutionist Richard Dawkins is banned in Turkey. (*Nature* 2009 Mar 10, doi:10.1038/news.2009.150)

China publishes more in top journals

China has tripled its research published in leading international journals in the past decade, a study by *Nature China* has found, reported by SciDev.Net. The study reviewed the number of mainland Chinese research papers published in *Cell*, the *Lancet*, *Nature*, the *New England Journal of Medicine*, and *Science* from 2000 to 2009. It found that the average number of published papers per journal has risen from seven in 2000 to 25 in the first half of 2009. By June 2009, mainland Chinese scientists had published 81 papers in *Nature* and 59 in *Science*. An analysis of papers registered by Institute for Scientific Information found that 37% of China's high citation papers in 2006 were chemistry related. (tinyurl.com/lesppo)

Comic Sans walks into a bar

Who would have thought a typeface could cause such controversy? Comic Sans, designed by Vincent Connare, has attracted the wrath of designers, who are offended by its use in contexts such as restaurant signage and even medical information. "These widespread abuses of printed type threaten to erode the very foundations upon which centuries of typographic history are built," says www.bancomicsans.com, arguing for a total ban. But the *Guardian* declares, "It can be a welcome break from those corporate Arians and oh-so-chic Helveticas. It has even given rise to jokes: "Comic Sans walks into a bar. Bartender says, 'We don't serve your type.'" (tinyurl.com/cs6p6e)

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