

News Notes

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

Outcome reporting bias exposed

Only 11 of 73 funders of randomized controlled trials who were contacted mentioned the importance of publication of negative as well as positive outcomes, a study in *Trials* has found (2008;9:66, doi:10.1186/1745-6215-9-66). The report highlights the need for more detailed guidance from funders to prevent outcome reporting bias. Publication bias, where statistically significant results are more likely to be published than those that are not statistically significant, is well recognized. However, outcome reporting bias, where only a subset of the original variables are reported according to the nature of the results, is less well documented. (www.knowledgespeak.com/newsArchiveview.asp?intMonth=11&intYear=2008, 28 Nov 2008 "More guidance needed to check outcome reporting bias, says report" online")

Professor charged with ghostwriting

A US inquiry has charged an Australian professor for being author of an article in the *American Journal of Obstetrics & Gynecology* that was sympathetic to a treatment after it was linked to cancer. The inquiry is investigating whether drug companies pay ghostwriters to favour their products. The professor stands by the article, and the drug company, Wyeth, denies paying authors and says that they have "substantive editorial control". Elsevier will investigate the allegations. In December Senator Chuck Grassley alleged that Wyeth commissioned articles to promote its hormone replacement therapy and had them ghostwritten

by a medical communications company. (www.knowledgespeak.com/newsArchiveviewdtl.asp?pickUpID=7381&pickUpBatch=1060#7381, 29 Dec 2008, "Australian professor charged in US enquiry on ghostwriting for medical journal")

More resources with open access

The *Bahrain Medical Bulletin* went open access from December 2008 and is published under a copyright that allows reuse of articles provided they are cited correctly. In the open access Global Library of Women's Medicine (www.glowm.com), recently launched by the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists in London, more than 650 experts discuss the latest options in women's medicine. And BioMed Central has unveiled the open access journals *PathoGenetics*, for researchers investigating the mechanisms of genetic disease, and *Epigenetics and Chromatin*, to discuss heritable changes that involve stable modifications of chromatin, DNA, or protein conformation.



Google feels credit contraction

The internet search provider Google will close its scientific data service, Google Research Datasets, in January, before the product's official launch. The experimental service was to offer scientists a way to store the terabytes of open source data that are generated in life sciences, pharmaceuticals, and other fields. A few weeks ago, the company's chief executive, Eric Schmidt, told the *Wall Street Journal* that Google

would cut back on experimental projects. Research Datasets is its third project to be abandoned in the latter months of 2008, after the SearchMash search results test and the Lively virtual reality program. (http://googlewatch.eweek.com/content/failure_to_launch/failure_to_launch_google_research_datasets.html, 19 Dec 2008, "Failure to launch: Google Research Datasets")

EU promises open access

The European Commission has launched a pilot project that will give unrestricted online access to research results funded by the European Union, primarily research published in peer reviewed journals, after an embargo of 6-12 months. The pilot will cover about 20% of the budget of the Seventh Research Framework Programme – €50bn between 2007 and 2013 – in disciplines such as health, energy, environment, social sciences, and information and communication technologies. Grant recipients will be required to deposit final manuscripts into an online repository and to ensure open access to these articles after publication. See <http://ec.europa.eu/research/science-society/index.cfm?fuseaction=public.topic&id=1680>

BMJ: 10 years' free access

The *BMJ* is officially an open access journal and has provided free access to its peer reviewed research online for 10 years. In 1998 it started to provide free access to the full text of research articles, to deposit the full text in PubMed Central, and to allow authors to retain copyright. The BMJ Group has also announced BMJ Unlocked (<http://adc.bmj.com/info/unlocked.dtl>), which allows authors who submit research to 19 specialist journals to pay a fee and make their work open access. For *Archives of Diseases in Childhood* the fee is £1700. (www.knowledgespeak.com/newsArchiveview.asp?intMonth=10&intYear=2008, 16 Oct 2008,

“*BMJ* completes 10 years of offering open access content”)

Pressure to publish scoop science

Research in *Cell* has been criticized by five researchers from four research groups in three countries for not properly crediting their earlier findings (2008;133:1093–1105, doi:10.1016/j.cell.2008.04.048). One critic, Peter Lawrence, said, “There’s a pressure on scientists to publish in these top journals to promote their work as more novel than it really is.” The paper’s main author has defended the work. In an unpublished letter to *Cell* Lawrence said that the paper “amounts to a theft of our intellectual property. . . . A paper in *Cell*, whatever the quality, will gain citations and eclipse our own discoveries.” See *Development* 2004;131:4651–4664. (www.the-scientist.com/templates/trackable/display/blog.jsp?type=blog&url=blog/display/55240&id=55240, 25 Nov 2008, “Critics rip *Cell* paper”)

Subeditors demand writer’s respect

A leaked email, splattered with expletives, showed the contempt that the restaurant reviewer Giles Coren has for subeditors at the *Sunday Times* newspaper. Coren’s 1000 word rant was complaining about the removal of a single indefinite article: “I do not enjoy the suggestion that you have a better ear or eye for how I want my words to read than I do . . . And the way you avoid this kind of fuck up is by not changing a word of my copy without asking me, OK? It’s easy. Not. A. Word. Ever.” The subeditors replied, “Subs are no more infallible than writers. So, let’s all try a little mutual respect, shall we?” (www.guardian.co.uk/media/2008/jul/23/mediamonkey, 23 July 2008, “Read Giles Coren’s letter to *Times* subs” and www.guardian.co.uk/media/2008/jul/29/sundaytimes.pressandpublishing, 29 July 2008, “*Sunday Times* subeditors reply to Giles Coren”).

Service aggregates journal contents

The tables of contents of 11,469 scholarly journals from 421 publishers can be viewed together in a service

from the UK Joint Information Systems Committee. The service, www.tictocs.ac.uk, is free to use and seeks to help researchers keep up to date with the most recent issues of journals on almost any subject. Users can view the latest contents for each journal; link to the full text; and save journals to view future tables of contents. And the service makes it easy to export webfeeds to popular readers. (www.knowledgespeak.com/newsArchieviewdtl.asp?pickUpID=7340&pickUpBatch=1054, 18 Dec 2008, “JISC funded TOCs service launched for scholarly journals”)



Libraries make comeback

Almost 60% of respondents said that they used library technology to help navigate to scholarly content 95% of the time, in a three year study. But publishers have responded less well to changes in users’ behaviour: readers are more likely than ever to visit a journal’s website at the article or abstract level. The white paper *How Readers Navigate to Scholarly Content* compared changes in users’ behaviour between 2005 and 2008 and the impact on the design and function of publishers’ websites. (www.sic.ox14.com/)

Springer buys BioMed Central

Springer Science and Business Media agreed in October to acquire the BioMed Central Group, a global open access publisher. BioMed Central was launched in May 2000 as an independent, for-profit publisher, committed to providing free access to peer reviewed biological and medical research. It is the largest open access provider in the world, with more than 180 peer reviewed journals. Biomed Central’s publisher, Matthew Cockerill, assured editors that a board of trustees “will continue to safeguard

BioMed Central’s open access policy.” Springer “has been notable . . . for its willingness to experiment with open access publishing,” he said. (www.sciam.com/blog/60-second-science/post.cfm?id=open-access-publisher-biomed-centra-2008-10-07, 7 Oct 2008, “Open access publisher BioMed Central sold to Springer”)

Open access association launched

The Open Access Scholarly Publishers Association (www.oaspa.org) was launched in October. Its mission is to support and represent the interests of open access journals publishers globally in all scholarly disciplines through an exchange of information, setting industry standards, and advancing business and publishing models. Membership is open to signatories of the Berlin or Budapest declarations, and organizations must publish at least one fully open access journal. Other parties that support open access publishing are also welcome. Founding members include BioMed Central, Copernicus, Hindawi, and the Public Library of Science. (www.ringgold.com/UKSG/si_pd.cfm?AC=0861&Pid=10&Zid=4119&issueno=181, 14 Oct 2008, “The Open Access Scholarly Publishers Association launched”)

Treat Déjà Vu with caution

Déjà Vu (<http://spore.swmed.edu/dejavu>), a free database of “extremely similar Medline citations,” which might represent duplicate publications, is not always to be trusted. An editorial in *Clinical Chemistry* points out many false entries in it, and warns that inclusion might damage the reputation and career of honest scientists. Reasons for misclassification include publishers’ error, follow-up studies from the same cohort, guidelines that are adopted or published by several cooperating journals, and articles republished in a different language. “A large number of authors may have to defend themselves to free their names from such unfounded allegations,” say the editorialists. (*Clinical Chemistry* 54:777–778, doi:10.1373/clinchem.2008.104794)

Misconduct policy criticized

The UK Research Integrity Office (UKRIO) has issued a standard procedure for universities to deal with allegations of research misconduct. But it has been criticized, with one campaigner comparing it to a “Band-Aid on a cancer.” The guidance says that universities should use at least one external investigator, but only after senior staff have decided whether the complaint is serious enough. Harvey Marcovitch, chairman of the Committee on Publication Ethics, said that the committee would prefer a mandatory system, but UKRIO thinks universities should continue to have responsibility for investigating complaints about their staff. (www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/story.asp?storyCode=403617§ioncode=26, 18 Sep 2008, “Misconduct policy branded ‘Band-Aid’ for cancer”)

SfEP chair thinks strategy

Sarah Price has taken the helm as chairperson of the Society for Editors and Proofreaders (SfEP). The society hopes that other appointments to the council will strengthen its strategic planning. “Our new professional development director will be building our portfolio of qualifications after our recent addition of the licentiate ship in editorial skills with the City and Guilds. Proof of editorial competency is essential for client confidence,” she said. “Everyone wants a top quality read. Our members always have this in mind. The challenge now is to take a strategic path to guide the development of more efficient editorial practices.”

COPE redesigns website

The Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) has a redesigned website and a new URL – <http://publicationethics.org>. It has also prepared guidelines for boards of directors of learned journals (<http://publicationethics.org/guidelines>). Journals should update any link to COPE’s website in their instructions. COPE welcomes comments on the guidelines and the new website. The committee is

concerned with the integrity of peer reviewed publications in science, and has more than 5200 members from all continents, mostly editors. COPE will appoint a full time director after a tenfold increase in membership this year. The publishers Elsevier, Wiley-Blackwell, Springer, Taylor & Francis, and the BMJ Group have signed up all their journals as members.



Lust in translation

The prestigious Max Planck Society has apologized after using calligraphy on the cover of a special China issue of its flagship magazine that turned out to advertise a Hong Kong strip club. The institute replaced the cover, which advertises “hot, young housewives,” of the online and English edition of *Max Planck Forschung*, but not before the German language version had been sent. The institute said that the Chinese text “had been chosen by our editorial office . . . To our sincere regret, however, it has now emerged that the text contains deeper levels of meaning, which are not immediately accessible to a non-native speaker.” (www.smh.com.au/news/home/technology/how-eminant-science-mag-got-hit-for-sex/2008/12/11/1228584998876.html, 11 Dec 2008, “Eminent scientific journal gets hit for sex”)

Geophysicists review colleagues' papers

Scientists at the Institute of Geophysics in Paris have been accused of reviewing papers by their colleagues at the institute. The papers were published from 1992 to 2008 in the Elsevier journal *Earth and Planetary Science Letters* while they were members of the editorial board, *Nature* reports. The scientists say that

the editorial process is open and that the allegations are “ridiculous.” The publisher maintains that reviewing papers from your own institution is unethical. One online response to the news story in *Nature* said, “This case exposes a general problem in French science: inbreeding, centralism, lack of transparency, and disregard for internationalism.” (*Nature* 2009;457:140, doi:10.1038/457140a)

Christmas lunch not dinner

Most *Daily Telegraph* readers eat “Christmas lunch” rather than “Christmas dinner,” said Simon Heffer, the paper’s associate editor, in an angry email to staff. “This is not the *Daily Star*,” he said. “I have exhorted you all to read carefully what you write. I think some of you are now doing this, but not always thinking about what it is that you read.” His favourite literals of that week were “hocky mom” and “plumb compote.” One reader wondered whether the newsroom was being run by “mnokeys.” Heffer said, “While it is good to provide the customers with amusement, it should be intentional.” (www.guardian.co.uk/media/2008/nov/28/simon-heffer-daily-telegraph)

“Going forward” is step backward

Office jargon “cloaks the brutal modern workplace in such brainlessly upbeat language,” says Lucy Kellaway, complaining on the BBC’s website, and usage trickles down into common parlance. “Like ‘like,’ ‘going forward’ is as contagious as smallpox. It started with business people, and now has not only infected farmers, it has reached epidemic proportions with footballers.” She also hates the phenomenon of “up”: “to free up”, “to head up”, and, worst, “to give a heads up”. To find out more about “idea showers”, “let’s touch base about that offline”, and “low hanging fruit” see <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/magazine/7457287.stm>

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