

## 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](mailto:rhurley@bmj.com)), with "News Notes" as the subject.

### Publishers pay to deposit research

Publishers, such as Nature Publishing Group (NPG) and Oxford Journals, are meeting the costs of depositing research in open access repositories to help scientists meet the requirements of research funders. The US National Institutes of Health, for example, require research that it funds to be made freely available no later than a year after publication. David Hoole, head of content licensing at NPG, said "Our primary focus is getting the deposit into PubMed Central and UK PubMed Central running smoothly for as many NPG journals as possible." NPG will deposit the manuscript as submitted by the author, but Oxford will deposit the published version. See [www.iwr.co.uk](http://www.iwr.co.uk) (<http://tinyurl.com/4jvngc> and <http://tinyurl.com/523cqp>)

### Researchers embrace journalists

More than half of researchers questioned rated their contact with journalists as mostly good, and four out of 10 found media coverage beneficial to their career, a survey reported in *Science* has found (2008;321:204–205). More than two thirds of researchers had contact with the media during a period of three years, and researchers in Germany, France, the United Kingdom, Japan, and the United States had similar numbers of interactions with journalists and were similarly content. The survey dispels the idea that scientists avoid journalists and are disappointed with the way that they communicate science to the public.

### Dictionary to drop words

Collins is threatening to drop obscure words from its English dictionary this year because it can't fit them all in. But its ruthlessness is tempered with a touch of clemency – and it's great public relations: it will save any of the words that appear six times in the company's database of recent word

usage in the media. Celebrities have chosen a word to rescue from a list of 24. Andrew Motion, the UK poet laureate, is lobbying for the retention of "skirr," which is the sound that the birds' wings make in flight. And Stephen Fry has chosen "fusby," which means short, stout, or squat. See <http://www.telegraph.co.uk> (<http://tinyurl.com/4v29t6>)



### The face of PubMed

The PubMed Faceoff site ([www.postgenomic.com/faces](http://www.postgenomic.com/faces)) displays PubMed results using a set of human faces, with features determined by the age, citation count, and journal impact factor associated with each paper. You can tell at a glance which papers are new, exciting, and high impact and which are languishing, uncited, and unread. The visualisation uses Chernoff Faces, a technique developed in the 1970s that depends on our ability to detect small differences in the size, shape, and expressions of human faces. Each dimension in a dataset is mapped to a different facial feature: the slant of eyebrows, size of nose, chubbiness of cheeks. See <http://network.nature.com/> (<http://tinyurl.com/42zy97>)

### Law demands patients' consent

UK data protection legislation insists that biomedical journals must always have explicit consent to publish medical information about an identifiable living patient, Jane Smith explained in the *BMJ* (2008;337:a1572). Doctors should

ask for consent before they lose touch with patients; alternatively, complete anonymisation might be a solution to not having consent. The *BMJ* used to waive the need for consent occasionally, but has revised its guidelines for authors.

The same issue of the *BMJ* considers the ethics surrounding an article that the *BMJ* rejected because consent had not been obtained that was subsequently published in a different journal. See also [www.ico.gov.uk/upload/documents/library/data\\_protection/practical\\_application/health\\_data\\_-\\_use\\_and\\_disclosure001.pdf](http://www.ico.gov.uk/upload/documents/library/data_protection/practical_application/health_data_-_use_and_disclosure001.pdf)

### Calling writers on diabetes

The Alliance for European Diabetes Research ([www.euradia.org](http://www.euradia.org)) wishes to draw the attention of the media and freelance journalists to its next press conference, near Frankfurt, Germany, on 26 November. In 2008 the alliance began a two year survey to identify gaps and highlight strengths to devise a strategy for diabetes research in Europe (DIAMAP, [www.diamap.eu](http://www.diamap.eu)). The alliance includes the major European diabetes stakeholder organisations and drug companies. EURADIA has been instrumental in highlighting the need for increased and better coordinated funding for diabetes research.

### Scientific integrity – on the wall

Justin Bilicki won this year's Science Idol competition, an cartoon contest with the theme of scientific integrity. Twelve of the finalists' cartoons are available as a 2009 calendar from the US Union of Concerned Scientists' website. The union says, "Recent investigations and surveys show that political interference in science has harmed the ability of federal agencies to protect our health, safety, and environment. We are building a foundation to guide the next president in restoring scientific

integrity to federal policy making. The next president and Congress must renew the independence of science at federal government agencies and create a thriving scientific enterprise." See [www.ucsusa.org/scientific\\_integrity/science\\_idol](http://www.ucsusa.org/scientific_integrity/science_idol)

### US launches open data repository

The US Department of Energy has launched a tool to find scientific data generated in the course of research sponsored by the department in various science disciplines ([www.osti.gov/dataexplorer](http://www.osti.gov/dataexplorer)). The data include computer simulations, numerical files, figures and plots, interactive maps, multimedia, and scientific images. The site is intended to be useful to students, the public, and researchers who are new to a discipline or looking for experimental or observational data outside their area of expertise. The search interfaces allow the user to understand, analyse, and use the data in the context of a user's own research. ([www.knowledgespeak.com](http://www.knowledgespeak.com) 2008 Jul 4)

### Standards versions of articles

Recommendations for describing different versions of journal articles have been released by the National Information Standards Organization in partnership with the Association of Learned and Professional Society Publishers. The guidance, from the technical working group, gives "a simple, practical way of describing the versions of scholarly journal articles that typically appear online before, during, and after formal journal publication." The guidelines aim to reduce the problem of multiple versions at different stages of the publication process being available online. The group explored the lifecycle of journal articles to identify common stages that describe the evolution of articles. See [www.niso.org/publications/rp/RP-8-2008.pdf](http://www.niso.org/publications/rp/RP-8-2008.pdf)

### Director and students in dispute

The director of the German Max Planck Institute for Biological Cybernetics has claimed that the journal *Human Brain Mapping* acted incorrectly when it published data taken without permission by research

students, *Nature* reports (2008;454:6–7). He says that the students' interpretation is incorrect, that the paper could mislead the field, and that the journal has denied him a right to reply. The students told *Nature*, "We are confident, and rigorous peer review agreed, that the data are appropriate. ... We stand by the conclusions we made in our paper."



### Who does peer review?

Ai Lin Chun, associate editor for *Nature Nanotechnology*, was asked who becomes peer reviewers, in the Nature Network forum. She looks for referees with a good publication record. Most are established academics, but younger researchers recommended by their professors who do a good job might be asked again. "I enjoy referees who provide a thoughtful, well balanced report with suggested improvements for the authors." Timeliness is also important: "We do have a chasing system, but it is certainly not my favourite thing to do." And bad reports don't help, regardless of status: "We feel less enthusiastic in asking them to review again after a few bad occasions." See <http://network.nature.com/groups/nnano/forum/topics/1761>

### UN criticises UK libel laws

The United Nations' committee on human rights has attacked UK libel laws for discouraging coverage of matters of public interest: British libel laws have "served to discourage critical media reporting on matters of serious public interest, adversely affecting the ability of scholars and journalists to publish their work, including through the phenomenon known as libel tourism," the committee said. In "libel tourism" wealthy plaintiffs can sue in the High Court in London over articles that

would not warrant an action in their own country. The UK government has been urged to require a would-be claimant to prove malice by a publisher or author. (*Guardian* 2008 Aug 14, [www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2008/aug/14/law.unitednation](http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2008/aug/14/law.unitednation))

### Publishers appoint US director

The Association of Learned and Professional Society Publishers (ALPSP) has appointed Isabel Czech as Executive Director, North America. Ian Russell, the association's chief executive, explained, "The membership of ALPSP is growing and much of that growth is from members in the United States and Canada. We have created this new position to help support the membership in North America." Czech has spent more than 30 years working in publisher relations at Thomson Scientific, now a part of Thomson Reuters. ALPSP's 350 organizational members in 37 countries publish more than 10,000 journals, about half the world's total. (<http://www.alp.org/>, <http://tinyurl.com/3fdvbw>)

### On the Nature of PLoS

A story in *Nature* about the finances of open access journal publisher the Public Library of Science (PLoS) has attracted criticism in the blogosphere. Nature Publishing Group publishes traditional subscription journals, and its news piece has been criticised for lacking objectivity. Declan Butler's story began: "PLoS, the poster child of the open access publishing movement, is ... relying on bulk, cheap publishing of lower quality papers to subsidise its handful of high quality flagship journals." He went on to mention *PLoS One's* approach to peer review and PLoS's use of unpaid staff. A selection of criticisms is at [http://scienceblogs.com/clock/2008/07/on\\_the\\_nature\\_of\\_plos.php](http://scienceblogs.com/clock/2008/07/on_the_nature_of_plos.php)

### Open access: no more citations

Articles available for free online are no more likely to be cited than articles published in a subscription journal, but online access is greater, a randomized controlled trial has shown (*BMJ* 2008;337:a568). The trial comprised 1619 research articles

and 11 journals published by the American Physiological Society. Fiona Godlee, editor of the *BMJ*, said, “The fact that these initial results suggest open access increases usage but not citations fits with the way in which citations are largely generated by people who already have access to the literature and for whom open access is therefore less of a benefit.” (<http://www.iwr.co.uk/>, <http://tinyurl.com/4repx3>)

### Long papers get cited more

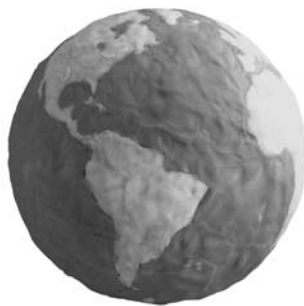
The median number of citations rises with the length of the paper, an analysis of 20,027 peer-reviewed astronomy papers published in 2000–2004 (<http://arxiv.org/abs/0809.0692v1>). On average, 2–3 page articles had six citations, and 50 page articles 50 citations. “I expected that shorter papers would be cited more than longer ones,” said Jörg Dietrich, of the European Southern Observatory. “I assumed that people don’t have time to read long papers.” With the increasing use of citation statistics as indicators of performance, there is a danger that a paper’s length might be increased to gain citations. (*Nature* 2008;455:274–275)

### “With credit comes responsibility”

The *Lancet* has censured a lead author who claimed honorary authorship as a reason for not overseeing a paper that the journal had to retract. The author’s university has accepted this defence even though the author had signed a statement before publication confirming that he had made a substantial intellectual contribution. “Using gift authorship as an excuse for not taking responsibility ... should not be tolerated,” the *Lancet* says. The research was retracted after legal and other irregularities became apparent—for example, in the way patient consent was obtained. See the paper (*Lancet* 2007;369:2179–2186), the retraction (2008;372:789), and an editorial about authors’ responsibilities (2008;372:778).

### Researchers post data online

Some scientists are posting all their research data online as soon as they produce it, in the interests of collaboration and to improve communication, *Nature* reports (2008;455:273). The risks include not being able to publish in a journal – for example, the American Chemical Society doesn’t allow prepublication in any form; having data stolen by rivals; and missing out on patents. Using a wiki with time stamps could be a way of showing evidence of priority. In research involving privacy of patients or animal experimentation, data should not be made fully or immediately available.



### Latin American journals get boost

The number of Latin American and Caribbean journals indexed in the Web of Science has doubled to 159 after Thomson Reuters changed their selection criteria to get the most influential, regionally important journals in the index. Abel Packer, at the Latin American and Caribbean Center on Health Sciences Information, said, “This notable increase ... matches up the efforts and advocacy that [the centre] has made in the last decades to enhance visibility and accessibility of the scientific production published in ... the region. The increase helps correcting the biases of the international indexes when indexing quality journals in this region.” (<http://espacio.bvsalud.org/>, <http://tinyurl.com/5xah45>)

### Editing magazine indexed

A complete index to *Editing Matters*, the magazine of the Society for Editors and Proofreaders, and its

predecessors *CopyRight* and *SFEP Newsletter* has been compiled by Christopher Phipps of the Society of Indexers. The index is online at <http://www.sfep.org.uk/pub/mag/index/indexhome.asp>

### Nature looks at big data

Marking the 10th anniversary of Google, the 4 September issue of *Nature* focused on big datasets: “As an increasing number of research disciplines are discovering, the vast amounts of data are presenting fresh challenges that urgently need to be addressed.” Articles in the issue look at managing petabytes of data, analysis of complex datasets, online community collaborations, and sophisticated techniques for visualization. “The future of science depends [on] cleverness again being applied to data for their own sake, complementing scientific hypotheses as a basis for exploring today’s information cornucopia,” an editorial concluded. (*Nature* 2008;455:1)

### Where are the negative results?

“In their own way, academic journals are exactly as selective as the tabloid health pages,” claims doctor and journalist Ben Goldacre in the *Guardian* newspaper on 20 September (<http://tinyurl.com/4lyrq2>). He writes that only 5.9% of industry-sponsored trials on cancer treatment get published and that 75% had positive results. Doctors and academics need all data, positive and negative, to make fully informed decisions about treatment and the direction in which research should go. A comparison of all cancer trials registered in [clinicaltrials.gov](http://clinicaltrials.gov) and published and indexed in PubMed found that only 17.6% of 2028 trials were published, 64.5% with positive results.

**Richard Hurley**  
rhurley@bmj.com

Thanks to Elise Langdon-Neuner, Joan Marsh, and Margaret Cooter, and to the Union of Concerned Scientists for permission to reproduce the cartoon by Justin Bilicki.