



## Letters

# Paying for bmj.com: Is this measure scientific literature's half open sesame?

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EDITOR—Over the past decade the *BMJ* has shown its commitment to widening access by providing universally free online content and reduced subscriptions for people in resource limited settings. Given its support for open access, it is regrettable that, in the face of falling paper sales, the journal should opt to squeeze subscriptions for the few years it has left instead of fully adopting the more progressive open access model.<sup>1 2</sup>

Under the open access model, each article is paid for only once, subsequently becoming freely available to everyone (with internet access). This point is not being lost on funders. In the United States, the Public Access to Scientific Information Act seeks to place all scientific research substantially funded by government in the public domain.<sup>3</sup> Currently, the US government spends \$45bn annually on scientific research, the results of which are largely unavailable to taxpayers. The privatisation of scientific information by publishers undermines the accountability of funders and the scientific community to the intended beneficiaries of such research—the public.

The *BMJ* as a leading medical journal can do much more to open the door to scientific information: by influencing competitors, funders, institutions, and individuals, and by working with independent researchers and those in under-resourced settings towards a more equitable form of publication. For the moment, this door remains ajar.

## Footnotes

- Competing interests The authors believe scientific research should be made freely accessible to all and are associate editors of a soon to be launched online, open access, peer reviewed journal.

## References

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2. Delamothe T, Godlee F, Smith R. Scientific literature's open sesame? *BMJ* 2003; **326**: 945–6.
3. McLellan F. US bill says government funded work must be open access. The bill also wants to break up and redraw the rules on scientific publishing. *Lancet* 2003; **362**: 52.