



Washington DC Principles
for
Free Access to Science

www.dcpinciples.org

Presentation of Robert D. Wells, Ph.D.

Good morning. I am extremely pleased to speak to you on behalf of the Washington, D.C. Principles for Free Access to Science, an organization of not-for profit publishers. I am the President of FASEB.

The Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology, or FASEB, is a consortium of 22 nonprofit, member societies with approximately 66,000 members. FASEB and the 22 societies publish 60 journals. Recent attention on the debut of the Public Library of Science journals may have led to the impression that the older and more established publications have not been improving or keeping up with the times. This impression is incorrect. The truth is that during the past several years scientific journals have been extraordinarily innovative, and as a result access to the research literature is greater today than ever.

Abstracts of virtually all medical research publications are free and easily accessible on the Internet. Most scientific journals are now available online. Many provide free access to online content within a year of publication and pay-per-view options to purchase more recent articles. Almost all scientific journals are available free of charge at state institutions or other large public libraries.

It has been the older, nonprofit journals such as *The American Journal of Physiology* and *The Journal of Biological Chemistry* that have pioneered some of the most impressive changes in scientific communication. Electronic publishing in the biomedical sciences was accelerated by journals that invested time and money in the effort to improve the speed of publication. Journals published by scientific societies like The American Association of Immunologists and the American Society for Pharmacology and Experimental Therapeutics have also responded to scientists' concerns about review time and implemented electronic manuscript submission, review, and redaction leading to faster publication. At great expense to themselves, and with no prospect of return on investment, scientific society journals have been archiving back issues (in some cases as far back as 1898) and making this wealth of information available at little or no cost.

In addition, these scholarly journals--created, managed, and financed by the members of scientific societies--perform a wide range of professional services. One such service is the provision of high-quality scientific peer review by experts. Using standards set by the specialty group, editorial decisions are made under the guidance of recognized authorities in each field. In this context, the pool of thousands of highly qualified reviewers is both deep and wide.

Journals published by non-profit societies are also able to perform valuable roles in setting professional standards and guiding young researchers. Because these journals are managed by groups of practicing scientists in a particular area of knowledge, they are uniquely able to nurture new authors, reviewers and editors as well as to present valuable opportunities for professional growth and development. Funds

derived from publishing activities are also used in some cases to fulfill the missions of scientific societies: the advancement of science and facilitation of scientific communications. This might include organization of meetings, scholastic support, educational outreach and other methods of information dissemination.

Journals published by FASEB members and other scientific societies represent a wide range of approaches to scientific communication, and this diversity is a major strength: it lends itself to experimentation and innovation. These publications have also demonstrated that they are sustainable over many decades and, in this era of rapid change, are not tied to a single model of funding.

Backers of PLoS couch their advocacy for their business model in populist terms. They say that they seek to provide free and immediate online access to scientific literature – a laudable goal, and one shared by many scientific societies. They also say that their large submission fee – and their paperless product -- will be sufficient to cover the costs of their efforts over the long-haul. There is reason to be skeptical. The costs of online scientific publishing are significant and include providing quality peer review, editorial services, formatting, indexing, archiving and web hosting. They presently rely on a \$9 million grant to subsidize their costs. What will happen when that grant runs out?

For more than a century, the current model of scientific publishing has provided a vibrant and dynamic venue for the dissemination of research results. It has produced a diverse hierarchy of journals based on widely accepted principles of quality and a vast array of editorial voices that respond quickly to emerging and evolving disciplines.

Times change, and so do income streams, and it would be a great mistake to tie all of our scientific communications to a single model dependent on a sole source of funding.