



Association for Molecular Pathology

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November 10, 2004

Elias Zerhouni, MD
Director, National Institutes of Health
9000 Rockville Pike
Bethesda, MD 20892

Dear Dr. Zerhouni:

The Association for Molecular Pathology (AMP) is a 501(c)3 not-for-profit organization whose mission is to promote clinical practice, basic research and education in molecular diagnostics and molecular pathology. Our mission is achieved through scientific meetings, educational courses, and the production of our scholarly scientific journal *The Journal of Molecular Diagnostics*, which we co-publish quarterly with the American Society for Investigative Pathology. While AMP espouses the basic principles of responsible and widespread scientific research dissemination and archiving, we oppose your proposal for “Enhanced Public Access to National Institutes of Health (NIH) Research Information,” as described in the *Federal Register* on September 17, 2004 (Volume 69, Number 180, Page 56074) because we believe that it is hastily conceived, redundant to many existing publishing resources, potentially harmful to existing scholarly scientific journals such as ours, and potentially costly to the American taxpayer with a correlative negative impact on the ability to adequately fund research projects.

AMP is a signatory to the Washington DC Principles for Free Access to Science (www.dcprinciples.org) and is committed to providing open access and wide dissemination of published research findings. We provide free and immediate public access to all our abstracts, and we provide free public access to our full articles 12 months after publication. More recent articles are available for free to subscribers or at the modest cost of \$8.00 to non-subscribers. Furthermore, we have joined the World Health Organization’s HINARI initiative, allowing free access to journal articles to underdeveloped nations and we make special provisions through our website (www.amp.org) for patients and their family members to request complimentary immediate access to specific articles for educational purposes.

The current business model for our journal depends on multiple revenue streams from member subscriptions, institutional subscriptions, advertising, reprints, and author charges. Especially since we publish a quarterly journal, of which 22% of accepted manuscripts acknowledged NIH funding in 2004, changes that would result from the NIH proposal may endanger our subscription base and consequently our advertising revenue, requiring us to triple author charges to be able to continue to afford to publish our journal.

The AMP Council is concerned that the NIH proposal as currently worded may have unintended adverse consequences on the ability of not-for-profit societies to fulfill their obligations to the scientific community. Specific points of our consideration include:

Redundancy of PubMedCentral and the Integrity of the Scientific Literature

The proposal defines the final manuscript as “the author's version resulting after all modifications due to the peer review process,” and thus does not explicitly ask for the final publisher-edited manuscript. Our authors recognize that serious errors in manuscripts are frequently corrected *after* the peer review process. We are extremely concerned that using any version other than the true “final” one that will be on our journal website after full redaction will cause confusion, at a minimum, and could significantly compromise the scientific record. Copyediting, proofing, reference checking, formatting of images, tables and data sets, and other functions performed by publishers add real value to manuscripts. It would be significantly less costly and more respectful of the integrity of the scholarly publishing enterprise for an NIH repository of peer-reviewed NIH-funded research to have links to our journal websites rather than providing an alternative version of manuscripts. If NIH staff require access to these articles for searching and indexing purposes related to grant evaluations, AMP would be willing to discuss mechanisms whereby NIH staff can have access to our publication's materials for private indexing and searching use.

Request vs. mandate

Although the proposal reads: “The NIH intends to request that...,” AMP Council feels that most, if not all, authors and grantees will view this as a mandate.

One size does not fit all: the six-month rule

Like many other publishers of scholarly scientific journals, AMP makes the content of its journal freely available after a designated period of time, based on our best assessment of the negative financial impact that shorter periods would have. By imposing too short an interval between publication and free access, the existence of some journals (and the not-for-profit associations that publish them) may be jeopardized. It is critical to consider that some specialized disciplines such as ours may be differentially impacted by the NIH proposal. Would there not be a more significant impact on journals that publish less frequently than monthly? Yet, the NIH proposal does not provide any financial impact data on varying segments of the scientific publishing enterprise. AMP was planning to initiate a “publish-ahead-of-print” feature, which would advance the online publication date of many of our articles. In practice, the proposed NIH six-month delay of free access to articles would be a three-month delay upon the launching of “publish-ahead-of-print”, with a further deleterious impact on our subscription revenues. We are considering delaying the “publish-ahead-of-print” feature until we better understand the implications of the NIH proposal.

Unfunded mandate, centralized government control and the politicization of science

AMP is gravely concerned that there is no guarantee that PubMedCentral will survive future budget cuts or will not be impacted by periodic freezes on government spending. What safeguards will be put into place to ensure that public access to the results of NIH-funded research will not be improperly manipulated for political objectives? In contrast, while it is our mission to service the scientific community as a whole and our members, authors and subscribers specifically, we have a very real commitment to the sustained archiving and access to the research published by our journal which supercedes and is independent of any current political or Federal government influence.

Potential impact on research funding

Currently, our business model for scholarly scientific publishing of our journal is not completely dependent upon author charges. Implementation of the proposal may require us to implement a model in which all revenue is generated through author charges. Should that occur, will NIH researchers be provided with sufficient funding to publish their articles in our journal without decreasing the number of research grants available to sustain the American biomedical research enterprise? The vagueness of the proposal to “carefully monitor requested budgets and other costing information ... [and] ensure that grantees’ budgets are not unduly affected” is very troubling.

Cost to NIH and the American taxpayer

AMP sincerely doubts that the NIH cost estimate for the NIH proposal is realistic. Does this estimate include staffing as well as technical costs, including the cost of developing and maintaining state-of-the-art archiving and search capacity? This is particularly disturbing since there are several outstanding online archives that publishers such as ourselves have already invested in without depending on American tax dollars.

Conclusion

As a not-for-profit publisher of scientific journals that has invested in electronic dissemination, we are particularly concerned about the implications of the NIH proposal for the scientific integrity of the literature as well as our ability to publish high quality peer reviewed manuscripts in the future. AMP urges NIH to reconsider its proposal and to develop a representative coalition of scientists and publishing partners to examine our shared goals of achieving enhanced access to the scientific literature without further endangering research dollars or the ability of not-for-profit publishers such as ourselves to cover our production costs and to promote programs to advance science for the public good.

Sincerely yours,



Angela M. Caliendo, MD, PhD
President, AMP,
For the AMP Council