

# European Science Editing

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European Association of Science Editors

a level comparable to their Western European counterparts. They started to publish in English to present original Polish work to the international scientific community. This seemed an obvious direction, if we keep the assumed integration with EU countries in mind. The development of certain other journals was slower. It seemed, however, that with financial resources available and editorial skills improving, the future of medical scientific journals in Poland could be assessed as relatively safe.

However, the large advertising potential of the pharmaceutical industry (Poland with 40 million inhabitants was regarded as a very tempting market) resulted in the emergence of a new category of periodicals — those published for profit. These were private ventures, being neither the organs of highly esteemed medical societies nor the representatives of major scientific institutions. These journals started to publish

translations from international periodicals and short reviews, but also included some original papers which had been rejected by more esteemed Polish journals. Being an “easy read”, published entirely in Polish, they gained considerable popularity among less demanding readers.

An entirely new development in this race for a share in the advertising market was the recent introduction of Polish language versions of major international journals (e.g. *JAMA*, *BMJ*, *Lancet*). A ranking system to define the journals presenting original work and to assess them according to their quality has now been introduced. It also aims to index the contents of those journals in the form of abstracts and present them worldwide in the form of a large database. This project is called Index Copernicus. It may eventually serve the entire region, and it deserves a separate presentation.

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## Correspondence

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### “Rejected but available”: a new way for journals to be open to innovative ideas

How can scientific publishing help promote a more open and tolerant scientific communication system while also maintaining quality? The history of science shows that on many occasions innovative discoveries (Horrobin 1990) or important articles were rejected by referees and editors of academic journals (Campanario 1995). At other times, challengers to dominant theories and paradigms have had a hard time getting published in mainstream journals (Martin 1999). These dissidents sometimes complain about censorship in science. Such complaints can reduce public confidence in science by creating an image of corruption and abuse by gatekeepers of orthodoxy.

Editors of academic journals argue that they have to reject many papers because they contain mistakes, or are not of sufficient quality or novelty, or just because journal space is scarce. They also want to protect readers from bad science. Readers trust academic journals when they believe that referees are doing their work properly. However, this process sometimes causes editors to reject path-breaking work: had the authors of some important discoveries not persisted, some Nobel-Prize-winning contributions might have been effectively suppressed (Campanario 1995).

How can the gatekeeping role of journal editors and referees be squared with openness to unorthodox but potentially important contributions? Some attempts and experiences exist on the publication of non-accepted papers (e.g. Marshall 2003). For example, articles posted on Netprints “have not yet been accepted for publication by a peer reviewed journal” (<http://clinmed.netprints.org/>).

Another cheap and simple way to avoid scientific suppression is for every issue of a journal to devote a page to a list of authors and manuscript titles that have been recently rejected and also include a full URL address on the journal web site from which an electronic version of the rejected manuscript can be

downloaded. Authors could choose between this approach and the traditional system in which their manuscripts are processed confidentially. If they prefer the new option, their rejected manuscripts would be labelled as “rejected but available”. Readers interested in these manuscripts could download them and judge at their own risk. Even better, if referees agree, readers would also be entitled to web access to referees’ reports to discover the “mistakes” in the manuscript or the reasons for the rejection.

With this new system, many innovative and unorthodox papers would be made available to interested readers; in some cases those papers could be inspiring. For many challengers of dominant paradigms, having papers “rejected but available” would be enough to announce their ideas to the world and their complaints would be avoided. Journal editors could experiment with this system that would allow more openness in science.

Given that a public rejection can be embarrassing, only scientists who strongly believe in the soundness of their work would be likely to follow the new track. Journal editors could ask authors to reveal whether any submission on a topic had been previously “rejected but available”; with access to referees’ reports, this information would reduce the global workload on editors and referees. Having such a publication outlet could well increase the amount of more speculative work. Charges of censorship and abuse of power by editors would be easily refuted.

A by-product of the above approach is that referees would be more accountable. This new method would also avoid the risk that authors are forced to publish their articles in obscure and/or inadequate journals after some rejections. Another by-product is that many manuscripts that are considered good but

not good enough to warrant publication, because of lack of space in the journal or other reasons, could still be made available to readers on the journal web site. As is often said, the reader is the ultimate referee.

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## Reports of meetings

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### Interacting with the digital environment: modern scientific publishing

46th Annual Meeting of the Council of Science Editors (CSE)  
3–6 May 2003; Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA

The digital age is here with its myriad new technologies. What is the impact of these new technologies? How will they change the very nature of the scientific publishing business and scientific organizations? What are the ethical issues raised by digital technology? What will happen to long-established institutions, such as copyright, the embargo system, and methods of peer review? How will the day-to-day business of publishing and printing be impacted? What needs to be overhauled or re-engineered? What are some new and more effective ways to present scientific information and improve our understanding of scientific information access, use, and readership? These are some of the questions discussed at the recent CSE meeting held in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

According to Brenda Gregoline, 2002–2003 Program Chair, this meeting was attended by over 350 people, including many who were new members or attending the conference for the first time. She noted the high quality of the presentations and the professionalism of the speakers, as well as the hard work of the CSE members who constituted the program committee.

The conference comprised 32 concurrent sessions, a keynote address, and two plenary sessions. Below are some highlights.

#### Keynote address: Author/institution self-archiving and the future of peer-reviewed journals

Stevan Harnad for 12 years has been arguing that the current system of researchers giving all rights to journal publishers restricts access to research information. He believes that authors should be able to post their peer-reviewed articles in freely available archives. This would increase the impact of their research on the progress of science. As it stands now, publishers are the primary beneficiaries of research information because they charge others for access to the material. Access to the material, therefore, is restricted to those who can afford to purchase it, such as institutions. A

comprehensive treatment of Harnad's argument can be read in the September 1998 *American Scientist Forum* ([www.ecs.soton.ac.uk/~harnad/Hypermail/Amsci/subject.html](http://www.ecs.soton.ac.uk/~harnad/Hypermail/Amsci/subject.html)). Through an "open access" rather than a "toll access" method for disseminating research information, citations of articles will increase and therefore the goal of scientists will be achieved, that goal being to advance the progress of science.

#### Plenary address: Ethics, science, and politics of cloning: the costly dilemma

Bypassing peer review is a great concern when it comes to any scientific innovation, but particularly when it comes to issues involving the beginning of life. Robert A Weinberg explained the two types of cloning — reproductive and therapeutic — and the push to grab headlines, bypassing peer review. Reproductive cloning, such as in the instance of Dolly the sheep and subsequent claims of cloned humans, is of great concern, according to Weinberg, because many reporters accept such information without question. Biotechnology companies have jumped in feet first, cloning cows and other animals, then going directly to the press with their results rather than publishing their findings in peer-reviewed journals to allow scientific scrutiny. Debates about the morality of cloning have resulted in a decrease in federal funding; however, the private sector continues with cloning despite the controversy. Because people differ in their beliefs about when life begins, the cloning controversy will continue.

#### Concurrent sessions

The concurrent sessions included practical discussions about daily operations in the editorial office. For example, how does one select a web-based database for manuscript tracking and peer review, and what are the advantages and disadvantages of choosing a commercially available product over a custom-developed system? Tables and graphs, a staple of scientific communication, and how to use them effectively to transmit scientific information, provided a lively discussion, with participants critiquing examples. The