

News Notes

News Notes are compiled by John Hilton (hilton.john@gmail.com)

Some of these items are taken from the *EASE Journal Blog* (<http://esebookshelf.blogspot.com>) where full URLs may be found

Science funder accepts range of research outputs

In October 2012, the US federal science funding agency, the National Science Foundation, announced a revision of its funding policy. From January 2013, applicants will be asked to provide a list of supporting "products" rather than just publications. Products "may include, but are not limited to, publications, data sets, software, patents, and copyrights." This change reflects the diverse outputs, and the measuring of that activity by altmetrics. In a Comment in *Nature* (2013;493:159), Heather Proctor, founder of impactstory.org, noted: "Scientists can speed the shift by publishing diverse research products in their natural form, rather than shoehorning everything into an article format, and by tracking and reporting their products' impact."

European open access report

The European Medical Research Councils (EMRC) has released a Science Policy Briefing entitled "Open Access in Biomedical Research". The report emphasizes the need for quicker adoption of open access to research articles in biomedical sciences across Europe, recognizing recent national initiatives and the hurdles yet to be overcome. The three main recommendations are: (1) open access is a moral imperative; (2) individual agencies must collaborate; (3) Europe PubMed Central should be extended across Europe. You can download the full report from the European Science Foundation website (www.esf.org).

Discovering faked images

In November 2012 the US Office of Research Integrity (ORI) found that

an NIH-funded nutrition researcher, Eric Smart, had falsified or fabricated a total of 45 images in ten published papers, seven grant applications, and three other reports, over a period of ten years. After a two-year investigation the ORI recommended that all the papers should be retracted, and the first retraction happened on December 24 in *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, as reported by the Retraction Watch blog (retractionwatch.wordpress.com). The retracted paper (2004; 101:2450) has been cited 98 times. Smart is no longer working as a researcher and is excluded from grant applications for seven years. Retraction Watch also reports on the fate of a whistleblower website set up in July 2012 to report suspicious data and images in published scientific literature. The site (www.science-fraud.org) was suspended in January 2013 following legal action from scientists whose work had been challenged by the site's anonymous contributors. One of the owners has since identified himself as Paul Brookes (University of Rochester, USA), who has expressed a desire to continue the work in a new forum.

His message to scientists whose work has been criticized: "If you didn't want your scientific data to be questioned, you shouldn't have published it."

IOB proposes COI database

The current system for reporting conflicts of interest is "fragmented and burdensome". That's the premise of a discussion paper published by the US Institute of Medicine in November 2012. The paper, "Harmonizing reporting on potential conflicts of interest: a common disclosure process for health care and life sciences", was the result of a roundtable meeting of representatives of health agencies, journals, societies, and consumer organizations. The report proposes a centralized, secured database for the disclosure and reporting of interests, accessible with permission from the individual concerned. The system would meet the requirements of existing legislation and is proposed to

operate as a non-profit organization.

SPRIT statement published

Medical editors can now refer to a range of standards (eg CONSORT) to ensure that research papers report fully what happened in a clinical study. But until now there haven't been equivalent standards for the conduct of the study. Clinical trial protocols are a crucial part of this, and are needed for registration and appraisal of the study. In response to concerns that not all protocols provide sufficient coverage of study elements, the SPIRIT (Standard Protocol Items: Recommendations for Interventional Trials) group was set up in 2007, aiming to "improve the quality of clinical trial protocols by defining an evidence-based set of items to address in a protocol". In January 2013 the SPIRIT statement was published, along with an "explanation and elaboration" paper. The statement includes a 33-item checklist and schematic. See www.spirit-statement.org for more details. The group is currently developing a tool to assist with protocol drafting.

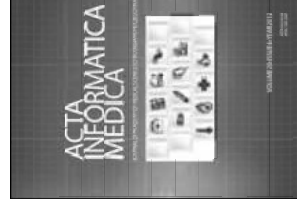
Data access: the reality

A study published in *The FASEB Journal* (3 January 2013) looked at the effect of mandatory data archiving on data access. Mandated data archiving policies that required a data access statement hugely increased the likelihood of data actually being available, whereas archiving rates at journals with less stringent policies were only slightly higher than in journals with no policies. The study authors recommend that "journal-based mandatory data archiving policies and mandatory data availability statements should be more widely adopted." The sometimes frustrating process of obtaining another scientist's data is captured in this brilliant video: <http://tinyurl.com/ease-news26>.

Peer review notes

The arrival of the new year saw two big journals reflecting on their peer review processes. In an editorial in *Science* (4 January 2013) editor-in-chief Bruce

Alberts described a forthcoming new process that allows peer reviewers to comment on other reviews of a manuscript, just prior to the accept/reject decision. The aim is to reduce the amount of revision needed for manuscripts. Over at *Nature* (3 January 2013), the focus was on how to better recognize the contributions of peer reviewers. Any reviewer who has refereed three or more papers for any of the *Nature* journals in a given year will get a free subscription (and a thank-you letter). Reviewers can also download a statement that lists how many reviews they have done, providing solid evidence of their contributions to the field. But what makes a good peer reviewer? Michael Callahan, editor-in-chief of *Annals of Emergency Medicine*, writing in *Reviewers' Update* newsletter, explains that training, experience, and seniority of academics are not good predictors of a peer review's quality, and training of existing peer reviewers is simply not cost-effective. "What then is a poor editor to do?" asks Callahan. He recommends adopting standardized measures of review quality, then periodic stratifying of reviewers (assuming your journal has a sufficient pool of reviewers to allow a choice).



Acta Informatica Medica

We are pleased to inform our readership that *Acta Informatica Medica* has been accepted for archiving in PubMed Central from 2012 onwards. The journal is a quarterly, peer-reviewed, open-access publication of the Society for Medical Informatics and the Academy of Medical Sciences of Bosnia & Herzegovina. During the past few years *Acta* was accepted for indexing by Scopus, EMBASE, EBSCO and some other prestigious online databases. The current editor-in-chief is Prof Izet Masic, a Council member of EASE. Along with health informatics, *Acta* covers issues on science communication, information and ethical publishing in biomedicine. Several authoritative reviews on science writing and editing, the EASE guidelines for authors and translators, and a report on the EASE 2012 conference were recently published in *Acta Informatica Medica*. All issues are now visible in PubMed and PubMed Central.

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Top tips for science bloggers

An end-of-year post by Victoria Costello on the PLOS Blogs Network (blogs-plos.org) lists the 10 essential qualities of science bloggers: share a love of science; respect your readers; make original research comprehensible to as many readers as possible; do it with attitude; praise your peers; show heart and humour; take a stand; enjoy civilized debate; pay attention to your

New list of predatory publishers

Jeffrey Beall, a librarian at the University of Colorado, maintains a list of questionable open-access publishers and journals, with the intent of warning authors and editors who may be approached by these journals. The 2013 list (available at scholarlyoa.com) includes 225 organizations and 106 independent journals; it is worth perusing the list to see the variety of tactics used to draw in contributors.

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