

Yale University drops Biomed Central membership

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The Yale University science libraries have decided to cancel their Biomed Central membership. Dramatically increasing page charges are the reason behind this decision. Other former members of Biomed Central include the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Brown University, The Jackson Laboratory, the drug company Eli Lilly, University of Oxford, Cancer Research UK, EMBL and DKFZ in Heidelberg, and many others.

The business model of Biomed Central and many other open access publishers relies on author charges to compensate for the costs to publish a journal article. This is in contrast to the journal subscription model of traditional publishers. Biomed Central membership means that the author charges are picked up by the institution, just as the institution traditionally pays for most journal subscriptions.

Yale University argues that author charges are not the best way to compensate for the costs of publishing a journal article, mainly because far fewer funding sources have to come up for the costs of publishing an article.

Increasing article costs are a driving force behind the open access movement (copyright retention by the author is the other important factor). The real cost for publishing an article is very difficult to calculate. For example, peer review is traditionally not paid for even though it is central to the publication process. The indirect costs of producing an article have moved more and more to the author, as electronic submissions now frequently require a lot of formatting and other pre-publishing work.

Most importantly, the publication cost should be put into perspective to the total cost of a research project. In almost all cases, the publication cost will be just a small fraction of the work hours, equipment and reagents that were needed to submit the paper in the first place.