

Addressing Myths and Questions Pertaining to Publishing in Open Access Journals

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Open access journals refer to scholarly publications freely available to readers on the internet. The advent of open access journals in the early 1990s found the majority of publications associated with small scale groups of scientists and educators.¹ The times have changed considerably. Now, a vast number of scholarly publications are available both in print and electronically, and there are over 5,000 publications in the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ).² I am pleased to announce that as of 2010 the *Athletic Training Education Journal* (ATEJ) is now among those included in the DOAJ.

I recently attended some focus groups regarding institutional repositories with other scholars on my campus, and open access journals were discussed. I found that some misconceptions exist related to open access journals. I then examined some literature related to these common misconceptions and found that although publishing in open access journals is widespread, some myths and questions continue to surface. The key myths concern the peer review process³ and quality of publications.⁴ The key questions include "Will readers find and cite my work that I publish in an open access journal?" and "do I have to pay for publishing in an open access journal?" The purpose of this editorial is to address these myths and answer these questions.

Myth #1: Open access journals are not peer reviewed.

In a 2005 study of authors who submitted to the *British Medical Journal* (BMJ), many respondents assumed that publishing in an open access journal meant doing so without peer review.⁴ Perhaps when open access journals first appeared on the internet many were perceived as a path of least resistance for publishing. Indeed authors could easily have created an on-line repository to place non-peer reviewed manuscripts making them accessible to all. However, all major open access initiatives concur that open access is to remove price and accessibility barriers, but not the

peer review process.³ One criterion for listing a publication in the DOAJ and other similar directories is, in fact, that the journal be peer reviewed.⁵ This is consistent with the Budapest Open Access Initiative (BOAI) guidelines.⁶ There may be some open access journals available to readers that are not peer reviewed, but these would not be listed in directories following the BOAI guidelines.

Myth #2: Open access journals lack quality

The quality of open access journal publications appears to be a concern for many potential authors.^{3,4} Maybe this concern is borne from belief in myth #1, or perhaps issues of quality are conflated with issues of prestige. Suber³ argues that prestige is based on reputed excellence, while quality is actual excellence. Quality and prestige positively influence each other, but prestige is time dependent—it does not occur immediately.³ Like the ATEJ, many open access journals are relatively new and, as such, prestige is likely not yet established. To that end, authors and readers must recognize that the perceived quality of an open access journal is a byproduct of the journal staff (eg, editors, editorial board) and reviewers, and is no different from traditional, print journals with similar human and financial resources. With time and continued submission of quality scholarly products, prestige and quality will grow.

Question #1: Will readers find and cite my work that I publish in an open access journal?

Authors more familiar with traditional print journals may believe that open access journals are not mainstream and, thus, their work may not be as readily found by other scholars. In a recent study published in the BMJ, a key finding was that open access journals were more heavily accessed and downloaded, but the number of citations (the number of times the articles were referenced)

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Full Citation:

Pitney WA. Addressing myths and questions pertaining to publishing in open access journals. *Athl Train Educ J*; 2010;5(4):154-155.

from open access journals was not higher than non open access journals.⁷ A study by Calver and Bradley also found that open access journal articles did not receive significantly higher citation rates compared to non-open access journals.⁸ These findings, however, contrast a study that found higher citation rates for open access journals across four disciplines.⁹ Based on this limited information, one's work published in an open access journal will certainly be found and accessed, but whether it is frequently cited may depend on many other factors.

Question #2: Do I have to pay for publishing in an open access journal?

One primary advantage of open access journals is making articles available to a multitude of readers at no cost.¹⁰ Many open access journals, however, are financed by imposing a fee for authors who publish.^{1,4} The answer to question #2, then, is dependent upon the journal selected as a potential publication outlet and their financial structure. The ATEJ does not use an "author pay" model.

Some research findings have indicated that an author charge for publication may inhibit submissions.⁴ Moreover, many authors hold negative perceptions related to the "author pay" models used by some open access journals.⁴

Closing Thoughts

Creating and transmitting new knowledge in professional publication outlets is a critical and noteworthy responsibility we have as scholars. I am both pleased and impressed with the National Athletic Trainers' Association for taking advantage of the open access movement and building a journal that is open and available to all.

Some misconceptions about open access journals still exist. Through dialogue we can lay bare common myths and provide answers to frequently asked questions that pertain to open access journals. As consumers of the ATEJ, I encourage all of us to educate our peers about the nature and principles of open access journals.

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