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Open access policies of high impact medical journals: a cross-sectional study

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This draft manuscript is a preprint that will be submitted to a peer-reviewed journal in due course, with the aim of publishing it with a CC BY licence. The work will be presented as a poster at the European Meeting of ISMPP on 23 January 2018.

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Abstract

Introduction

Journal publishers increasingly offer governmental and charitable research funders the option to pay for open access with a Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) licence, which allows sharing and adaptation of published materials for commercial as well as non-commercial use. The Open Access Scholarly Publishers Association recommends this licence as the least restrictive Creative Commons licence available. We set out to investigate whether pharmaceutical companies are offered the same options.

Methods

Using Journal Selector (Sylogent, Newtown, PA, USA), we identified journals with a 2015 impact factor of at least 15 on 24 May 2017, and excluded journals that only publish review articles from the analysis. Between 29 June 2017 and 26 July 2017, we collected information about the journals' open access policies from their websites and/or by email contact. We contacted the journals by email again between 6 December 2017 and 2 January 2018 to confirm our findings.

Results

Thirty-seven non-review journals listed in the Journal Selector database, from 14 publishers, had a 2015 impact factor of at least 15. All 37 journals offered some form of access with varying embargo periods of up to 12 months. Of these journals, 23 (62%) offered immediate open access with a CC BY licence under certain circumstances (e.g. to specific research funders). Of these 23, only one journal confirmed that it offered a CC BY licence to commercial funders/pharmaceutical companies.

Conclusion

The open access policies of most medical journals with high impact factors restrict the dissemination of medical research funded by the pharmaceutical industry. To give the scientific community freedom to read, reuse and adapt medical publications, publishers and academic journal editors would ideally allow pharmaceutical companies to fund unrestricted and immediate open access with a CC BY licence.

Introduction

Freely accessible research publications support innovation in the public and private sectors by allowing previous research to be built upon, encouraging collaboration, speeding up research dissemination and improving the transparency of research across the world.[1-3] It also benefits public health by supporting informed decision-making.[4,5]

Open access means that readers do not have to pay to access peer-reviewed scientific research articles; however, open access is more ambitious than just making content free to read.[2] To realize the full potential of open access in supporting innovation, research publications should, on the condition that the source is appropriately attributed:

- be freely available to the end user at the time of publication
- allow for unrestricted reuse of content.[3]

Creative Commons licences attached to publications allow authors to retain copyright of their work and to stipulate the restrictions that apply to its reuse.[6] A Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) licence allows sharing and adaptation of published materials for commercial as well as non-commercial use.[6] It is recommended by the Open Access Scholarly Publishers Association as the least restrictive type of Creative Commons licence available and by the Budapest Open Access Initiative as the optimal licence for open access publishing.[7,8]

There is no harmonization between journals in their options for publishing open access and a key area of difference is the types of Creative Commons licence on offer: common derivatives of the CC BY licence include CC BY-NC, which restricts commercial reuse; CC BY-ND, which restricts adaptation; and CC BY-NC-ND, which restricts both (Table S1).[9]

Governmental and charitable research funders increasingly mandate publishing open access with a CC BY licence.[10-13] The Medical Research Council, for example, requires grantees to publish their work in journals that offer immediate access with a CC BY licence.[10,14] In 2014, the Charity Open Access Fund was established by six partner UK charities (Arthritis Research UK, Bloodwise, the British Heart Foundation, Cancer Research UK, Parkinson's UK and the Wellcome Trust) to ensure that the researchers and organizations they support

can access the funds required to pay article processing charges and make research papers open access with a CC BY licence.[15]

Although the pharmaceutical industry funds approximately half of all medical research,[16,17] no pharmaceutical company currently mandates that the research they fund is published open access with a CC BY licence.

We set out to clarify the open access options offered by journals with high impact factors and whether pharmaceutical companies are given the same options as non-commercial funders.

Methods

Using Journal Selector (Sylogent, Newtown, PA, USA), we identified journals with a 2015 impact factor of at least 15 (accurate on 24 May 2017); we excluded journals that only publish review articles. We collected information on the open access policies of the selected journals from their websites and by email contact, making up to three attempts between 29 June 2017 and 26 July 2017.

We categorized the least restrictive open access variant offered by each journal, using our own classification, according to:

- whether a CC BY licence was offered
- whether there was an embargo period
- which version of the article would be available (published, accepted, submitted).

For journals that offered a CC BY licence, we also assessed:

- article processing charges
- funding requirements for obtaining a CC BY licence.

Between 6 December 2017 and 2 January 2018 we sent emails to the journals requesting confirmation of our findings (Table S2).

Results

Least restrictive open access variant offered by journals

Fifty-three journals listed in the Journal Selector database had a 2015 impact factor of at least 15. Sixteen review journals were excluded and 37 journals from 14 publishers were included in this analysis. Table 1 shows the categories for the least restrictive open access variant offered by each journal.

Table 1. Categories for the least restrictive variant of open access offered by each journal.

Category	Version of article available	Embargo period	CC BY licence offered by the journal?
1	Published	None	Yes
2	Published	None	No
3	Published	6 months	No
4	Accepted	6 months	No
5	Accepted	12 months	No

CC BY, Creative Commons Attribution.

Immediate open access with a CC licence was offered by:

- 3 (30%) of the 10 journals with the highest impact factor (impact factor 30.4–137.6)
- 23 (62%) of the 37 journals analysed (Figures 1 and 2).

The types of CC licence available from these 23 journals were:

- CC BY from 23 journals (100%)
- CC BY-NC from 5 journals (22%)
- CC BY-NC-ND from 20 journals (87%).

The 14 journals, from six publishers, that did not offer open access with a CC licence offered access to different versions of the article either immediately, after a 6-month embargo period or after a 12-month embargo period (Table 2).

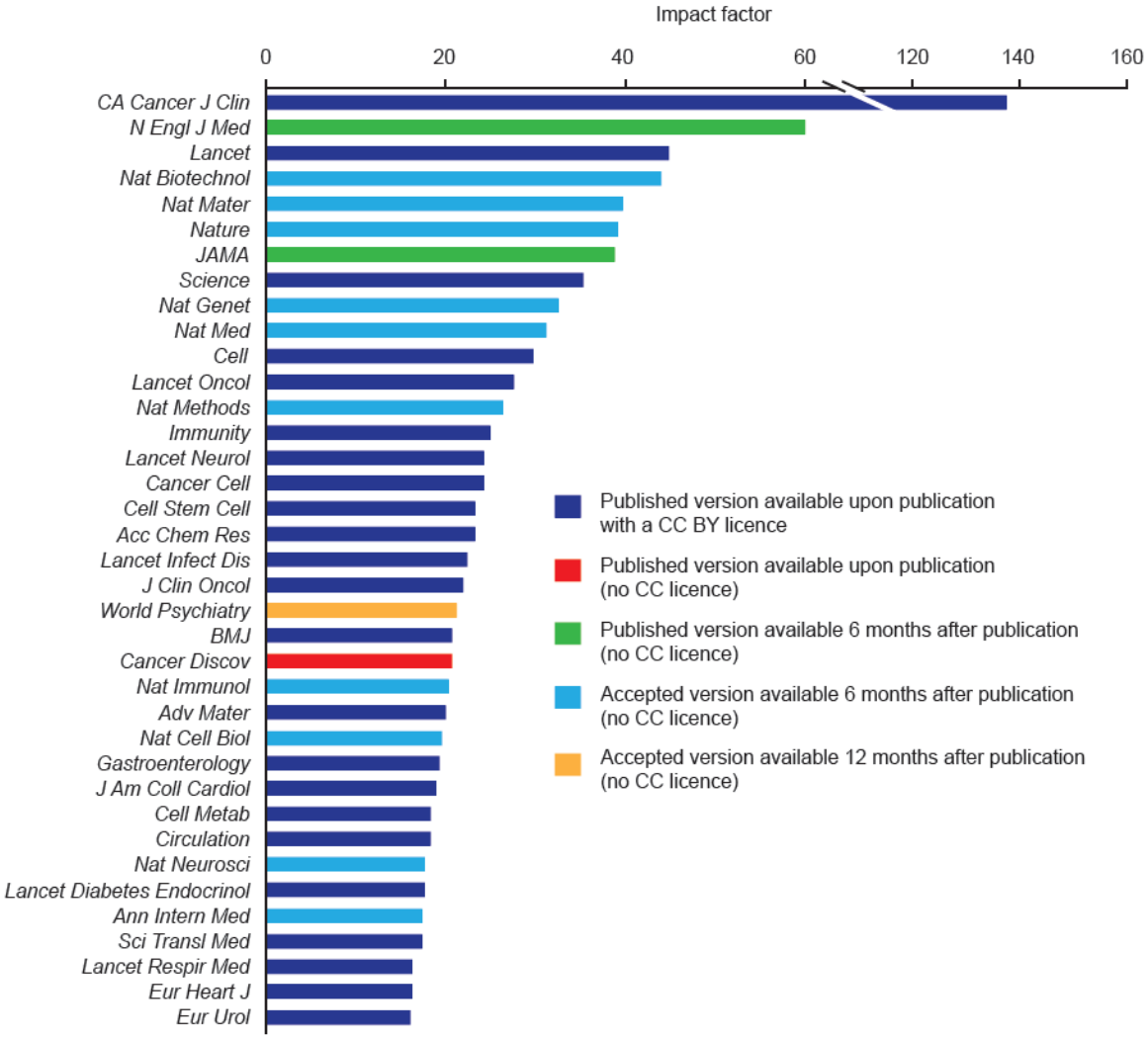

Figure 1. Journals ranked by impact factor and categorized by their least restrictive open access variant available (n = 37).

CC, Creative Commons.

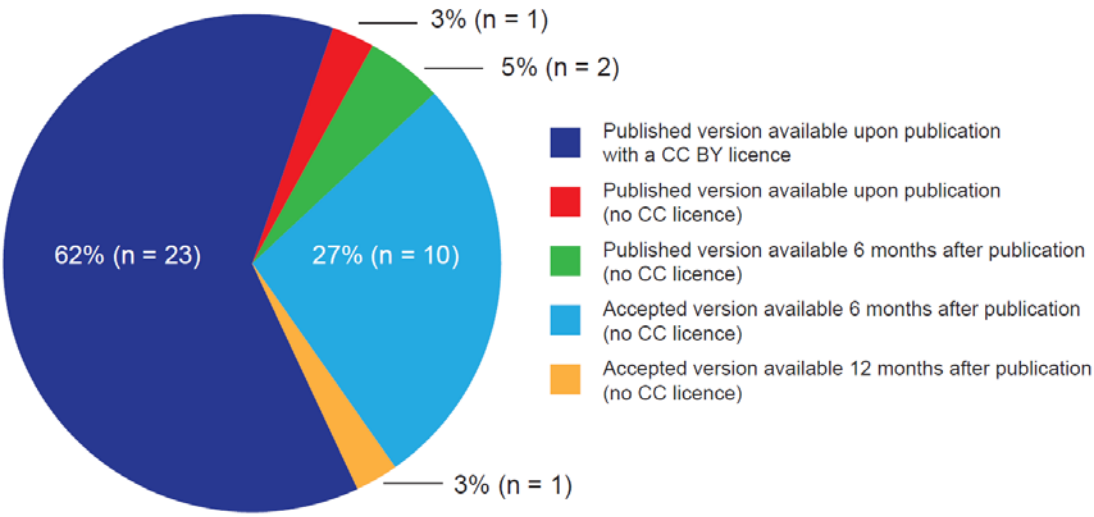

Figure 2. Journals categorized by their least restrictive open access variant available (n = 37).

CC, Creative Commons.

Table 2. Access policies of journals with high impact factors that do not offer open access with CC licences.

Publisher	Journals included (n = 14)	Open access variant
American Association for Cancer Research Journals	*Cancer Discov*	***Immediate:*** PV ***6–12 months after publication:*** AV
American College of Physicians	*Ann Intern Med*	***6 months after publication:*** AV
American Medical Association	*JAMA*	***Immediate:*** PV ***6 months after publication:*** PV
Massachusetts Medical Society	*N Engl J Med*	***6 months after publication:*** PV
Nature Publishing Group	*Nature*; *Nat Biotechnol*; *Nat Cell Biol*; *Nat Genet*; *Nat Immunol*; *Nat Mater*; *Nat Med*; *Nat Methods*; *Nat Neurosci*	***6 months after publication:*** AV
Wiley-Blackwell	*World Psychiatry*	***Immediate:*** SV ***12 months after publication:*** AV

AV, accepted version; CC, Creative Commons, PV, published version; SV, submitted version.

The cost of open access with a CC BY licence

Of the 23 journals that offered a CC BY licence, 21 (91%) disclosed article processing charges on their websites. Across these journals, charges ranged from US$3000 to US$5000; the most common article processing charge (65% of journals) was US$5000 (Figure 3). Details of the fees charged by the remaining 2 journals (9%) are not available from their websites because the details are only provided when the article is accepted.

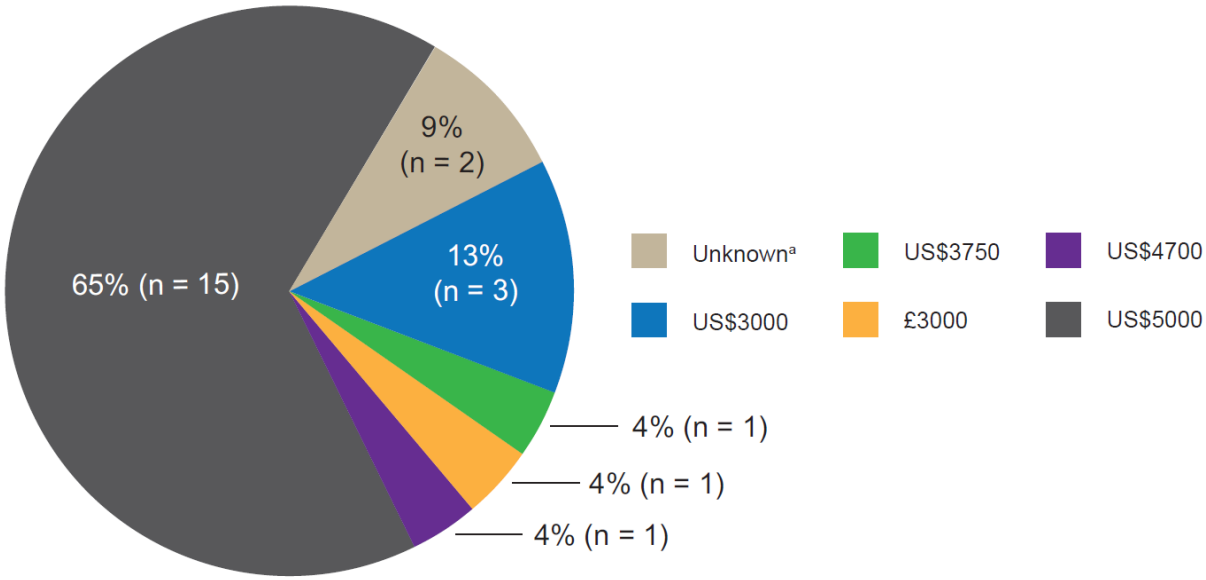

Figure 3. Article processing charges of journals that offer immediate open access with a CC BY licence (n = 23).

The article processing charge for obtaining a CC BY licence from *Acc Chem Res* (US$5000) is lower if authors are paid members of the American Chemical Society.[18]

[a]Details on processing fees are provided at acceptance.[19]

Relationship between authors' funding source and the availability of open access variants

Table 3 shows the open access policies of journals with high impact factors that offer open access with a CC BY licence. Of the 23 journals listed, only one – *Accounts of Chemical Research* – had an open access policy that allowed this option for commercial funders/pharmaceutical companies.

Table 3. Open access policies of journals with high impact factors that offer immediate open access with the CC BY licence (n = 23).

Publisher	Journals included (n = 23)	Open access variant	Funding requirements for obtaining open access with a CC BY licence
American Association for the Advancement of Science	*Science*; *Sci Transl Med*	***Immediate:*** CC BY, no CC licence (AV – personal/institutional website) ***6 months after publication:*** no CC licence (AV) ***12 months after publication:*** no CC licence (PV)	The American Association for the Advancement of Science will allow authors funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to publish their research with a CC BY licence
American Chemical Society	*Acc Chem Res*	***Immediate:*** CC BY, CC BY-NC-ND, no CC licence (PV) ***12 months after publication:*** no CC licence (PV)	Authors who wish or are required by funders to have a CC BY license may purchase for a fee Following email contact, the publisher confirmed that the CC BY licence is available to all authors, regardless of their source of funding
American Society of Clinical Oncology	*J Clin Oncol*	***Immediate:*** CC BY, CC BY-NC-ND ***6 months after publication:*** no CC licence (PV) ***12 months after publication:*** no CC licence (PV)	CC licences available only if funders are academic institutions, not-for-profit organizations, philanthropic foundations or government agencies
BMJ Group	*BMJ*	***Immediate:*** CC BY, CC BY-NC	CC BY licence available for authors when the funder requires it (funders who mandate CC BY include the Wellcome Trust, RCUK and the MRC)
Cell Press	*Cancer Cell*; *Cell*; *Cell Metab*; *Cell Stem Cell*; *Immunity*	***Immediate:*** CC BY, CC BY-NC-ND ***12 months after publication:*** no CC licence (AV)	CC licences available only to authors covered by a funding body agreement (these non-commercial funding bodies are listed on the journal websites)

Publisher	Journals included (n = 23)	Open access variant	Funding requirements for obtaining open access with a CC BY licence
Elsevier	*Eur Urol*; *Gastroenterology*; *J Am Coll Cardiol;* *Lancet*; *Lancet Diabetes Endocrinol*; *Lancet Infect Dis*; *Lancet Oncol*; *Lancet Neurol*; *Lancet Respir Med*	***Immediate:*** CC BY, CC BY-NC-ND (includes AV) ***6 months after publication:*** no CC licence (PV)	CC licences are available to authors funded by specific funding bodies (these non-commercial funding bodies are listed on the journal websites) Elsevier has established agreements and developed policies to allow authors who publish in Elsevier journals to comply with manuscript archiving requirements of various funding bodies (these non-commercial funding bodies are listed on the journal websites)
European Society of Cardiology	*Eur Heart J*	***Immediate:*** CC BY, CC BY-NC, CC BY-NC-ND, no CC licence (AV/SV) ***12 months after publication:*** no CC licence (AV)	Authors funded by RCUK or the Wellcome Trust can use the CC BY licence for their articles
Lippincott Williams & Wilkins	*Circulation*	***Immediate:*** CC BY, CC BY-NC, CC BY-NC-ND ***6–12 months after publication:*** no CC licence (AV)	Note that authors funded by RCUK or the Wellcome Trust may choose the CC BY licence if they agree to pay the article processing charge and commercial reuse of the article is not a factor
Wiley-Blackwell	*Adv Mater*	***Immediate:*** CC BY, CC BY-NC, CC BY-NC-ND, no CC licence (SV) ***12 months after publication:*** no CC licence (AV)	Authors whose funders have licensing mandates will be automatically directed to a CC BY licence (the select funders that have unique agreements with Wiley are outlined on the journal's Funder Agreements page)
Wiley-Blackwell	*CA Cancer J Clin*	***Immediate:*** CC BY, CC BY-NC, CC BY-NC-ND, no CC licence (SV/PV) ***12–24 months after publication:*** no CC licence (AV)	All authors funded by RCUK or the Wellcome Trust will be directed to the CC BY licence

AV, accepted version; CC, Creative Commons; CC BY, Creative Commons Attribution; MRC, Medical Research Council; NC, Non-Commercial; ND, No Derivatives; PV, published version; RCUK, Research Councils UK; SV, submitted version.

Discussion

We found that the majority of journals with a high impact factor that were included in this study offer open access with a CC BY licence; however, with the exception of one journal that does not publish evidence from clinical trials, this option appeared to be available only to authors funded by non-commercial organizations. Some journals allowed authors to obtain a CC BY licence when the work was supported by funders who mandated its use; however, at present, pharmaceutical companies do not mandate CC BY licences.

Here, we present a thorough analysis of open access policies of journals with a high impact factor, including society-owned journals, from multiple publishers. We met our objective to clarify the open access policies of all journals analysed, and received confirmation of our findings by email from 97% of the journals. Although our study covers only a small number of journals, extending such a manual analysis to a greater number of journals without loss of detail and still being able to confirm our findings efficiently would be difficult. When more extensive mining of journal (meta-)data becomes available, however, this study could be easily repeated for a bigger cohort of journals. To our knowledge, it has not been reported previously that the availability of open access options depends on authors' source of funding.

Limitations of this study are that we only investigated journals listed in the Journal Selector database with an impact factor of at least 15, and that, because impact factors and the open access policies of journals and publishers are subject to change, the information may not be current. Furthermore, by selecting journals with a high impact factor, our analysis does not include prestigious journals from certain therapy areas and regional journals.

The constraints imposed by journals and publishers that prohibit commercial funders from publishing open access with a CC BY licence are incompatible with key political declarations such as the Budapest Declaration,[8] the Berlin Declaration[20] and the Bethesda statement,[21] which aim not only to give end users immediate access to research articles but also to give them the opportunity to reuse material without restrictions. Moreover, pharmaceutical companies fund medical research with the aim of helping to develop effective treatments that address unmet patient needs; placing restrictions on access to this research is not in line with key ethical principles such as those laid out in the Declaration of Helsinki.[22]

Good Publication Practice version 3 (GPP3) guidelines state that authors should take responsibility for the way research findings are published.[23] In line with these recommendations, pharmaceutical companies can and should advise authors to reach a consensus on which journal to publish with, to avoid predatory journals, and to adhere to sponsor guidelines and regulations. There may be scope for pharmaceutical companies to introduce internal guidelines recommending open access publishing.

Our research shows that roughly one-third of the journals with a high impact factor that we assessed do not offer immediate access to the published version of a manuscript upon publication, even though the open access policies of many funders with respect to embargo periods echo the recommendations set out by open access declarations.[8,20,21] The World Health Organization expects trial data to be published in a journal within 24 months of study completion.[24] The Research Councils UK policy supports open access, with a preference for immediate access with the maximum opportunity for reuse, which would be granted by a CC BY licence.[10] Horizon 2020 requires its beneficiaries to make publications open access as soon as possible upon publication and to make every effort to allow for maximum reuse of the materials, whether that be copying, distributing, searching, linking, crawling, mining or some other use.[2] This position is supported by the European Research Council.[25]

A potential conflict of interest for publishers in relation to their willingness to offer CC BY licences to the pharmaceutical industry is the revenue generated from reproducing article content and reprints. Fees for the reproduction of copyrighted materials can, for example, range above several thousand dollars for using a single chart.[26] Recent research by Lundh *et al.*[27] aimed to quantify reprint revenues as a proportion of journal income. Of the six journals investigated, only the two European journals – the *BMJ* and *The Lancet* – disclosed the information requested. The editors of the US journals – *Archives of Internal Medicine*, *Annals of Internal Medicine*, *JAMA* and the *New England Journal of Medicine* – did not provide the data. For the *BMJ*, reprint revenues constituted 3% of its overall income; *The Lancet* obtained 41% of its revenue from reprints.[27] In *The Lancet*, industry-funded publications constituted a large proportion of highly reprinted articles (63/88) compared with a sample of control articles from the same journal (23/88).[28]

Another factor that may be causing publishers to place restrictions on the reuse of materials funded by the pharmaceutical industry could be concerns over the possible misuse or misrepresentation of pharmaceutical data by any end user; however, such activities would be offences under existing compliance regulations and would attract fines.[29] In support of credible evidence-based medicine, and owing to the competitive nature of pharmaceutical companies, it is likely that they scrutinize their competitors' evidence, and identify and report any breaches of good practice to regulators.

Two of the journals included in our analysis, *Science* and *Science Translational Medicine*, both published by the American Association for the Advancement of Science, do not disclose article processing charges on their websites; instead, they provide this information upon their acceptance of an article.[19] This practice is common among predatory journals and does not comply with the Directory of Open Access Journals guidelines,[30] which state that processing fees must be stated clearly on journal websites in a place that is easy to find for potential authors prior to submitting their manuscript.

Future research could focus on a larger selection of journals than the current study, or on journals from a specific therapy area, to further clarify the use of open access variants in the medical publication landscape.

Conclusion

To maximize societal benefit from medical research and to align journal policies with open access declarations, funders of research, including the pharmaceutical industry, should be allowed to have their research read and reused immediately after its publication. This is best achieved by publishing research open access with a CC BY licence, which is recommended as the least restrictive licence available. At present, journals with a high impact factor restrict commercially funded research from being published with this licence, and pharmaceutical companies do not mandate its use.

To align publishing policies with the open access declarations,[8,20,21] the Horizon 2020 program supported by the European Research Council,[2,25] and the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors[31] and GPP3[23] guidelines, the publishing industry and the pharmaceutical industry must work together. By offering authors the option of publishing

their research with a CC BY licence, irrespective of funding source, publishers and journals can support immediate and unrestricted open access to publications to give the global scientific community, patients and the public the opportunity to learn from and build on medical research.

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Competing interests

Tim Ellison, Tim Koder, Laura Schmidt and Amy Williams are employees of Oxford PharmaGenesis, Oxford, UK. Chris Winchester is a Director and a shareholder of Oxford PharmaGenesis Holdings Ltd.

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Conceptualization, project administration, T.E. (https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0307-725X), T.K. (https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6152-7365), L.S. (https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6117-781X), A.W. (https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9354-6402); methodology, resources, investigation, formal analysis, T.E.; writing – original draft, T.E. and L.S.; visualization, T.E; writing – review and editing, T.E., T.K., L.S., A.W., C.W. (https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3267-3990); supervision, T.K., L.S.

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Supplemental information

Table S1. Definitions of CC licences commonly used by medical journals.[6]

Type	Definition
CC BY	Free to distribute and adapt the original work, even commercially, if the original creation and authors are credited
CC BY-NC	Free to adapt the original work non-commercially and, although derivative works must also acknowledge the authors and be non-commercial, they do not have to be licensed on the same terms
CC BY-NC-ND	Free to download the original work and share it if the authors are credited, but the work cannot be adapted or used commercially

CC, Creative Commons; CC BY, Creative Commons Attribution; NC, Non-Commercial; ND, No Derivatives.

Table S2. Emails to and from journals.

Publisher	Journal (n = 37)	Email question	Email response
American Association for Cancer Research Journals	*Cancer Discov*	(To: pubs@aacr.org) (Sent: 6 December 2017) I have been looking on the AACR website for information about open access options for Cancer Discovery. Please could you confirm that the options available for this journal are: Immediate open access: open access to the published article without a Creative Commons (CC) licence Access 6–12 months after publication: green open access with no CC licence (accepted version uploaded to a repository – only if funded by a specific non-commercial organization)	(From: …@aacr.org) (Received: 14 December 2017) I have copied our archiving and open access policies below. You can also find these policies on our website (http://aacrjournals.org/content/authors/copyright-permissions-and-access). If you have any other questions, please let me know.
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Elsevier	*Lancet;* *Lancet Diabetes Endocrinol;* *Lancet Infect Dis;* *Lancet Oncol;* *Lancet Neurol;* *Lancet Respir Med*	**Email 1:** (To: editorial@lancet.com) (Sent: 6 December 2017) I have been looking on individual journal websites for information about open access options for the Lancet, Lancet Diabetes Endocrinol, Lancet Infect Dis, Lancet Oncol, Lancet Neurol, and Lancet Respir Med journals. Please could you confirm that the options available for these journals are: Immediate open access: open access to the published article with CC BY and CC BY-NC-ND licences (only available to authors funded by specific non-commercial organizations – listed below); green open access with optional attachment of CC BY-ND-ND licence (accepted version uploaded to personal/institutional websites or a repository) Access 6 months after publication: green open access with no CC licence (published version uploaded to journal website and/or a repository) Gold and green access are only offered to research funded by specific organizations: Arthritis Research UK, Austrian Science Fund, British Heart Foundation, Cancer Research UK, UK Chief Scientist Office, UK Department of Health UK, UK Department of International Development (DFID), Dunhill Medical Trust, Motor Neuron Disease Association, Parkinson's UK, one of the UK Research Councils, Telethon Italy, or Wellcome Trust; WHO (including International Agency for Research on Cancer [IARC]); Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation; Breast Cancer Now or Bloodwise; Worldwide Cancer Research **Email 2:** (To: …@elsevier.com) (Sent: 7 December 2017)	**Email 1:** (From: …@elsevier.com) (Sent: 6 December 2017) In the instructions for authors http://www.thelancet.com/authors/lancet/authorinfo there is a section dedicated to Open Access. You can reference this for your research. I hope this answers your question. If there is anything else I can help you with, please let me know. **Email 2:** (From: …@elsevier.com) (Sent: 7 December 2017) Only papers submitted after a certain date and funded by specific organizations (see Open Access section of the Information for Authors for further details) can apply for Open Access. I hope this helps you better. Let me know if you require further help.

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