

# A reply from HHMI

Tom Cech, Jack Dixon, Avice Meehan, Josie Briggs, and Carl Rhodes

**To: The Editors of The Journal of Cell Biology:**

The Howard Hughes Medical Institute (HHMI) recently announced a policy on Public Access to Publications for its investigators and Janelia Farm Research Campus scientists (<http://www.hhmi.org/about/research/policies.html#papp>). This policy requires our scientists to publish in only those journals that make original research articles and supplemental materials freely accessible through a public database within six months of publication.

The policy seeks to balance the goal of public access and the equally important value of scholarly freedom—the goal of our scientists to allow their graduate students and postdoctoral fellows to publish their work in the journal of their choice. To bring more journals into compliance with our policy, we have concluded agreements with Elsevier and Cell Press, as well as other publishers, including the American Society of Hematology. Such conversa-

tions will continue with both for-profit and non-profit publishers.

Rossner and Mellman (1) have criticized HHMI for not using its influence to coerce Elsevier into making their content public after a short delay without compensation. It should be noted that the \$1,000 we are paying for each Cell Press article and \$1,500 for other Elsevier publications is not profit to the publisher, but a reimbursement for their lost revenue in providing accelerated free access and their time and effort in uploading HHMI manuscripts to PubMed Central. Furthermore, HHMI already makes payments at a similar level to a wide array of non-profit and for-profit publishers for immediate or accelerated access to publications, as does the Wellcome Trust.

Scholarly publishing is in flux, not simply in the biological sciences. Virtually all publishers, ranging from

scientific societies and non-profit organizations to major corporate entities, are reconsidering their policies and business models. Now that the lid to the open-access publication box has been opened, there's no closing it again. We applaud The Rockefeller University Press and other non-profit publishers for taking an early lead in providing rapid free access to the scientific literature.

## Reference

- Rossner, M., and I. Mellman. 2007. How the rich get richer. *J. Cell Biol.* 177:951.

T. Cech, J. Dixon, A. Meehan, J. Briggs, and C. Rhodes are at Howard Hughes Medical Institute, Chevy Chase, MD 20815

Correspondence to Avice Meehan: meehana@hhmi.org

**Response to HHMI from Mike Rossner (Executive Director, The Rockefeller University Press) and Ira Mellman (Editor in Chief, The Journal of Cell Biology):**

It seems clear from the HHMI response that they missed the point of our Editorial. They note that they are providing public access to HHMI-funded research with their outlay of cash to publishers (both commercial and non-commercial). This fact was not in dispute.

They do not, however, address the effect of their actions on the public access movement—that is, the effort to get publishers (especially commercial publishers, who have refused to release the bulk of their content to the public) to provide public access to their holdings after a short delay. If the Rockefeller University Press does not need reimbursement to provide free access after 6 months, neither should other publishers. Elsevier already makes vast sums of money publishing publicly

funded research, and they should feel an obligation to give something back to the public. Paying publishers to provide spotty access to just a few of the papers they publish (e.g., those authored by HHMI investigators) does not address the issue of public access to *all* of the scientific literature. HHMI had an opportunity to exert some pressure on publishers to achieve that goal, and they chose not to do so. Although they claim they were trying to find a balance between public access and “scholarly freedom,” they did not succeed. Instead, the public access movement has suffered because HHMI gave in to the selfish desire of some of their investigators to continue publishing in *Cell*. This serves neither the public, nor science.



©cartoonbank.com. All Rights Reserved.