Reviewer’s report

Title: Open to the Public: Paywalls and the Public Rationale for Open Access Medical Research Publishing

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Reviewer: Roger Wilson

Reviewer's report:

I find this article challenging, not because of the content but because the authors promote and support one business model for publishing over another based on their own agenda and without considering other issues. To be fair, their title implies that this is what they would do.

Their argument is built on social values, which I fully subscribe to, but they do not give consideration to alternative models which might offer value which is assessed in a different way. They assume that profit is the only outcome from a 'capitalist' model and they do not consider whether there may be other outcomes of non-monetary value or methods of mitigating the impact they describe. Open access to published research results is a crucial topic for all the reasons the authors put forward. Their case that paywalls are a barrier to the wider understanding of science is a slightly simplistic claim. One important challenge is whether they also protect science from the 'fake news' movement. Do they? By cultivating their exclusivity do they also ensure that the most significant science gets the widest exposure to those of influence?

The medical publishing world is a very tight market, dominated by just five large companies. Their ability to raise prices for institutions is already causing some significant institutions to reconsider their subscriptions and to promote open access routes to their researchers. Some of these publishers also operate open access journals. This may not be a sustainable market model in the longer term quite apart from the 'open access' movement.

I feel that this article needs to be published. Hopefully it will get the debate going with some business-aware and independent viewpoints offered. Ideally we will see business models more openly described as debate evolves and there is always the possibility of new models being developed. One of these may offer a method for registration of lay subscribers with free access.
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