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Open access publishing in Gastroenterology - good for the researcher and good for the public!

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We wish to highlight to readers the benefits of making their work open access. Advances in the internet have enabled a rapid growth in open access publishing.¹ However, most scholarly articles still remain behind paywalls.²

Open access publishing has numerous benefits. Firstly, open access publishing enables equity to access. Anyone with internet access has the opportunity to access research published via the open access route.³ It is also important that the public have access to newly published research, as a lot of research activity receives public funding.⁴ Furthermore, open access may increase accessibility of research to developing countries,³ which has wider societal benefits.

Citation metrics can be important aspect of academic impact, with data on citation metrics of open access versus non-open access publications being variable.³ We reviewed the effect of open access publishing on citation metrics in the field of gastroenterology. We reviewed original research articles in Gut, Gastroenterology and the American Journal of Gastroenterology (AJG). Publications were cross referenced with the Web of ScienceTM database to determine overall citation rates.

Between Jan 2009 to Dec 2013, 3057 original research articles were published (Gastroenterology [n=1431], Gut [n=732], AJG [n=894]). Of these, 154 (5.0%) were open access publications (Gastroenterology [n=13], Gut [n=70], AJG [n=71]). Overall, open access publications in the three journals had significantly higher citation rates than non-open access publications (median citation rate: 38.5 versus 33, p=0.044), highlighting the benefits of open access publishing in the field of gastroenterology.

Whilst there are significant benefits of publishing via the open access route, there are potential hurdles preventing widespread adoption. There are questions regarding the quality of scientific journal publishing via the open access route. However, the methodological quality of studies has been demonstrated to be the same in open access versus non-open access publications.^{5 6} Cost may also be a barrier. With the Gold Model of open access publishing, the onus of the cost is with authors. However, there are groups aiming to shift the cost of open access publishing to funders or universities.⁷

To summarise, the benefits of open access publishing are significant, with our data highlighting the benefit on citation metrics for open access publishing in gastroenterology journals. We would recommend our colleagues to publish via this route.

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