Editorial

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Funding Independent Scientific Publications: The Third Option

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The existing "Triple-Pay" model for funding scientific publications faces widespread criticism due to the significant financial burden it places on researchers, institutions, and the taxpayers.[1,2] In this model, research funding agencies provide grants to conduct research, indirectly compensate the peer review process, and subsequently pay publishers through substantial subscription fees to access the published research. This consumes up to 25% of the funds allocated for research and places a significant economic strain on the academic community while disproportionately benefiting major publishing conglomerates.[2,3] Since it was first introduced in 1930 by the American Physical Society at $2 per page, the cost of scientific publishing has escalated considerably, exceeding $12,000 per article, with publishers such as Elsevier, Springer Nature, Wiley, Taylor & Francis, and SAGE controlling a vast portion of the academic output.[4,5] These big publishers were accused of leveraging their dominance to impose high subscription fees upon institutions, authors, and readers.[2,3]

Hence, the publishing industry continues to face what can be described as an ongoing "Trial by Media" with frequent accusations of monopolizing and commercializing scientific knowledge, charging excessive fees, prioritizing sensational research over rigorously conducted but less eye-catching studies, and systematically rejecting negative or inconclusive, yet important, reports.[2,6] These practices distort the philosophy of science by incentivizing studies that prioritize statistical significance over reproducibility and scientific value.[7] The consequence is a misallocation of resources and efforts, as researchers are compelled to pursue topics with high publication potential rather than those driven purely by scientific curiosity or societal need.[4,5]

In response to these challenges, alternatives have been proposed to replace the "Triple Pay" model, however, most of them succumb at the implementation phase.[3,7] One such attempt was Germany's Big DEAL, which sought to negotiate large-scale contracts with publishers to reduce costs and provide broader access to academic journals. However, the initiative collapsed due to unsustainable cost escalations and the inflexible contractual terms imposed by publishers.[7] Similarly, Plan S, initiated by the European Commission to promote open-access publishing, faced considerable resistance from stakeholders due to fragmented implementation and a lack of unified policy enforcement.[5,7] While open access movements have made scientific knowledge more available to the public in up to 20% of scientific publications, they have often transferred the financial burden from funding agencies to individual authors, exacerbating inequalities between well-funded and underfunded researchers.[5] Similarly, the institutional repository option remains costly to maintain and often lack the prestige and visibility associated with established journals and publishers.[5]

Despite valid criticisms of the Triple-Pay publishing model, one of its crucial roles in the traditional publishing industry has rarely been discussed: the independence of the publication process.[3,7] Freeing academic publishing from institutional control is essential to maintaining scientific integrity, as it ensures that research is evaluated based on merit rather than institutional priorities or funding masters. While reforming the financial structure of scientific publishing is necessary, eliminating the independence of journals could introduce new risks, includ-

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ing institutional biases in manuscript evaluation and funding allocation.

If a revised funding model is to be successful, it must balance cost efficiency with editorial independence, ensuring that peer review and research dissemination remain insulated from undue influence. We propose "the third option" for funding scientific publishing: modeled after the most cost-effective and high-performing health system in the world-Singapore's Central Provident Fund, that pays for health care and essential housing for the residents.[8] The inefficiencies in the current scientific publishing model bear a striking resemblance to the U.S. and other health systems around the world, where high costs, third-party dominance, and lack of price transparency lead to excessive expenditures without matching improvements in quality. Singapore's approach effectively mitigates moral hazard in healthcare funding by fostering cost-consciousness, individual responsibility, and market-driven efficiency while maintaining high-quality care. Hence, the proposal of Institutional Publication Savings Accounts (IPSA) for scientific publishing, where a portion of research grants is allocated to cover Article Processing Charges under control of the academic institution or individual principal investigator.

IPSA would centralize funding at institutions, reducing the financial burden on individual researchers while ensuring equitable access to an independent peer reviewed publishing. High-impact research could receive additional IPSA support. An Additional Publication Assistance Fund would serve as a safety net. Since IPSA is managed either by universities or by individual researchers, it grants them greater leverage in negotiations with publishers at the time of publication. Unlike a prepayment accounts, which serve as an advance payment to publishers, further strengthening the publishers' control over pricing—IPSA empowers the academic community by ensuring more equitable and transparent publishing costs.

This model would enhance cost transparency, promote fair pricing through institutional negotiations, and eliminate redundant expenses from the Triple-Pay model. By mirroring Singapore's efficient healthcare financing mechanism, IPSA could create a more sustainable, equitable, and competitive yet independent academic publishing services, ensuring broader global access to independent scientific research.

Disclosure Statement

Reida M. El Oakley serves as the Co-Editor-in-Chief of the Journal of the Best Available Evidence in Medicine and founder of Open Science Press, London, UK. Khairya K. Elmuttardi serves as the managing editor of the Journal of the Best Available Evidence in Medicine. Ahmed E. Atia declares no conflicts of interest.

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