

Open access: the *JCI* has already shown it works

Sir— There has been much media attention surrounding the launch of the new open-access journal, *PLoS Biology* (see, for example, *Nature* **425**, 554–555; 2003), which many scientists like myself hope will prove to be a success. However, some of the claims of originality for this venture are not warranted. The proposed model, in which authors pay the costs of free electronic access, has already been tested successfully by an existing high-profile periodical, the *Journal of Clinical Investigation (JCI)*. Since the *JCI* went online (www.jci.org) in 1996, its content has remained completely free to everyone, with no barrier of any kind (J. B. Hawley *J. Clin. Invest.* **112**, 968–969; 2003). This fits with the philosophy of its parent organization, the American Society for Clinical Investigation (ASCI).

Although the publishing and financial models of the *JCI* are not exactly the same as those of *PLoS Biology*, the only major difference appears to be that the ASCI holds copyright to articles. However, this is meant primarily to ensure the long-term integrity of the published work, and authors are not prevented from using the electronic version in any way that

would advance the cause of science.

Overall, the positive experience of the *JCI* with author-paid electronic free access augurs well for the future of *PLoS Biology*, and for other journals that may choose to take this path.

Of course, the same model may not apply easily to journals such as *Nature*, which also have to cover the costs of extensive front matter and general science policy and news reporting, thus serving a somewhat different role in scientific publishing.

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