

From: Patrick Brown

Sent: Friday, January 13, 2012 12:42 PM

Subject: Re: Response to RFI on public access to scientific research

The federal government has a responsibility to the taxpayers who are paying for the federally funded research and on whose behalf it is being conducted to ensure that they receive the greatest possible return on their investment and that they have unrestricted freedom to read, use, evaluate, criticize and benefit from the results of that research.

Both of those responsibilities are best served by removing all barriers to access or use of the formal published record of the research.

Before the internet, those barriers were a necessary evil. The most efficient way to maximize access to research results was to print and distribute research reports in peer-reviewed journals, each copy of which cost money to print and distribute, necessitating limits on distribution and charges for each copy. The traditional scientific publishers (generally) did this well.

With digital publication on the internet, the costs of publication are completely independent of the number of copies distributed or the number of readers who have access. Restricting access and distribution to preserve a pay-per-copy business model that has been rendered obsolete by the internet makes no economic sense.

Anything short of immediate and complete open access to all published results of non-classified, publicly-funded research results would be cynically putting the narrow interests of a scientific publishing industry dominated by a few multinational megacorporations ahead of the vitality of the scientific research endeavor and the benefits it brings to public health, quality of life, job creation and economic growth. Any policy that in any way favors delayed or restricted access over immediate open access to scientific research would sacrifice jobs that would otherwise be created by technology- and research-intensive businesses whose competitiveness depends on access to the latest research results. Any policy that in any way limits any practicing physician's access to the most up-to-the-minute published results of the research that the citizens of the United States have funded would be a betrayal of their trust.

No self-serving argument put forward by the scientific publishing industry (of which I am a part) can possibly outweigh our fundamental responsibilities to the citizens who fund our research. The "old school" scientific publishers fear open-access publishing as a disruptive threat to their huge profit margins, but open-access publishing is a thriving business and may well have been the greatest source of growth and job creation in the scientific publishing industry in the past few years.

I am a full-time research scientist at Stanford University and a co-founder of Public Library of Science, a non-profit open-access publisher of scientific research. I have benefitted greatly from the generosity of the citizens of the United States who have had the extraordinary vision and altruism to support the greatest scientific research system in the world. It is my privilege and my obligation to make any results of my research unconditionally available for the benefit of the people who made it possible.