



Biomedical Alliance in Europe

Open access initiatives must not create inequality

Member societies of the Biomedical Alliance in Europe (BioMed Alliance), an association of 34 leading European medical and research societies, would like to highlight concerns around some key provisions in Plan S that insufficiently protect the needs of researchers in Europe and beyond. These issues were also raised in a statement made by the European Research Council (ERC) on 20 July 2020. The statement can be found [here](#).

The ERC Scientific Council statement says that while the ERC continues to be committed to realising open access, it has withdrawn as a cOAlition S supporter. It noted that researchers' needs, particularly those of young researchers, and the need to preserve equity among different communities and countries, were insufficiently protected. The ERC is particularly concerned that the publication of research results in hybrid journals will no longer be an acceptable model of publication under Plan S.

Member societies of the BioMed Alliance are supportive of the transition to open access. They publish hybrid and open access journals, and recent initiatives have included making material on COVID-19 freely available (without cost to the author or reader) to healthcare professionals and the public across Europe. Nonetheless, they have expressed concerns about certain aspects of Plan S, particularly regarding the specific consequences for the publication of high-quality journals by medical societies and the health sector as a whole.

Plan S requirements could harm the publication of research

Medical societies echo the concerns of the ERC about the position of health researchers, and argue that Plan S could disproportionately affect certain groups of researchers, including younger researchers, researchers that do not benefit from any form of funding and researchers from specific geographical areas (leading to divides both within Europe and between Europe, and other parts of the world). In this way, instead of removing barriers in science, it will paradoxically create them. While Plan S foresees article processing charges (APC) waivers for authors based in low-income countries, this is not the case for researchers across Europe who do not have the support of their institutions or from public and charitable grant funding but conduct high quality clinical, or dry-lab research. Many publishers are not in the financial position to provide waivers for all who might require them. The publication model imposed by Plan S requirements could hamper or undermine the publication of outstanding research if the authors must pay to disseminate their results (or make their work public at the author accepted manuscript stage prior to the refinement offered by the publishing process), leading to further discrepancies among researchers and to lost opportunities to publish research which covers specific health research niches.

The quality of research should always be guaranteed

Medical societies would like to highlight that Plan S may affect the quality of published research. Medical societies set the standards which guide healthcare worldwide. These standards are based on the highest quality information provided by publications that undergo stringent peer review and quality control processes. There is the risk that society journals funded solely by an APC model will have to prioritise quantity rather than quality, or even that the price of APCs will be driven higher to fund the actual cost related to managing the editorial and peer review processes (leading to unsustainability for independent society publishing). Health research saves lives; it is therefore



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essential that medical journals have the right mechanisms in place to ensure that only high-quality studies that are based on sound evidence are published.

Hybrid journals

The hybrid subscription model provides a fair publishing option for both authors as well as society journals. The revenue created from these journals for their societies is reinvested as part of their non-profit organisation status, in societal impact, scientific and educational activities or even reinvested in publishing: funding long-term archiving, new journals, journals that may serve specific niches to cater to specific needs of health professionals and which may not be able to command APCs, and cross-publisher infrastructure. The provision of review papers, or editorials is an important membership benefit for medical societies and motivates readers to remain a Society member. This has been proven important, for example during the COVID19 pandemic. Members of Biomedical Societies could be easily reached, quickly informed and properly educated through their respective Societies. During the COVID-19 pandemic, societies have been at the forefront in providing reliable information, and in these challenging times they will find it difficult to comply with Plan S in the suggested timelines. Transformative agreements take time to negotiate and this process may be further delayed due to the pandemic.

BioMed Alliance members therefore endorse the European Research Council position and its concerns that Plan S does not sufficiently support researchers' needs. They nonetheless remain committed to continuing the discussions with all relevant stakeholders to ensure an inclusive and sustainable transition towards open access.

Signatory Societies:

European Academy of Allergy and Clinical Immunology
European Academy of Neurology
European Association for the Study of the Liver
European Association of Urology
European Atherosclerosis Society
European Federation of National Associations of Orthopaedics and Traumatology
European League Against Rheumatism
European Organisation for Research and Treatment of Cancer
European Renal Association – European Dialysis and Transplant Association
European Respiratory Society
European Society for Paediatric Gastroenterology Hepatology and Nutrition
European Society of Anaesthesiology and Intensive Care
European Society of Cardiology
European Society of Endocrinology
Federation of European Biochemical Societies

About the Biomedical Alliance in Europe:

The Biomedical Alliance in Europe is a unique initiative between 34 leading European medical societies that together include more than 400,000 researchers and health professionals. It is a not-for-profit organisation committed to promoting excellence and innovation in the European healthcare field with the goal of improving the health and well-being of all European citizens.