



## Too valuable to put a price on

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**A**ccess to information is essential for scientific progress, yet in many places it remains very limited. Given how easy it is to post an article on the web, where it is freely available to anyone who has access to the Internet, the current system based on subscription journals is coming increasingly into question (see Focus, p. 61). Governments, who foot the bill for most university libraries, and the charity sector, who are important sponsors of cancer research, are foremost among those examining possible alternatives.

New models of publishing are already starting to emerge, which have the potential to give millions of people worldwide access to scientific literature.

Unfortunately, the debate between advocates of open access and the traditional bastions of scientific publishing has become increasingly polemical.

Proponents of the current system argue that many clinicians are drowning in literature and have no time to keep up to date with every development in their speciality. Journals provide a reliable filtering mechanism and a robust means of assuring the quality of their contents through their tried and tested peer-review system. Moreover, many scientific journals are published by professional societies who reinvest revenues from sales to help them fulfil their mission.

Advocates of the open access model, on

the other hand, argue that the more accessible the findings of research, the more likely we are to avoid duplication of effort and promote research in areas where data need to be replicated. They also point to the vast amount of information already in the public domain, much of which is of questionable quality, and argue that free access to credible, peer-reviewed information is a public necessity.

In an attempt to find a workable compromise, a coalition of 49 not-for-profit publishers in the US, including AACR, ASCO and ASH, have proposed a model for the dissemination of scientific literature under which publishers would:

- Make important articles of interest available online at the time of publication
- Make the full text of their journals freely available to everyone worldwide either immediately or within months of publication
- Make the contents of journals freely available to scientists working in low-income countries.

*Cancer World* welcomes the US initiative as a sustainable basis for providing open access to scientific information.

Even though we are a magazine and not an academic journal, we post our articles on the Web within one month of publication. We urge European cancer societies to take similar steps to promote the widest possible dissemination of information in their journals.