Before discussing the ethical arguments in favor of an open access (OA) journal, I must disclose the obvious fact that I am co-editor in chief of the *International Journal of Women’s Dermatology*, our Women’s Dermatological Society OA journal that is published by Elsevier. Although I currently receive no stipend for this co-editorship, holding this position does in fact create a conflict of interest for me. In an effort to be completely transparent, I also need to share with you that at the outset, I was very against the OA model and appalled at the processing fee requirement for authors. Now, after 2 years of exposure to an OA journal, I have altered my opinion.

We can all likely agree on some basic issues: (1) Scholarly journals are at the core of academic medicine and perhaps still the best way to substantiate research; (2) subscription-based journals are expensive and often associated with a drawn-out review time and publication date delay; and (3) dissemination and sharing of new information is vital to medical science. Our university libraries pay large amounts of money to subscribe to journals, which in the present environment of cost constraints is becoming problematic. Most academic center libraries can no longer afford to subscribe to all the specialty journals to which we need access. The subscription model journal often limits access to only those institutions that are able to purchase the subscription or to those individuals with the personal resources to cover the cost of subscription.

Requiring access to an article that is not available through one’s university library is frustrating. Locating the article on the internet only to find out that viewing and downloading the article requires a charge card is infuriating. At the same time, one needs to realize that publication in subscription journals has hidden costs, including, for some journals, the costs to the authors to produce images in color. Meanwhile, junior faculty members want to and, for promotion, are required to publish manuscripts in a journal that will afford them the largest audience and highest chance of being cited. Publication in a highly reputed journal has historically guaranteed that one’s work is more widely circulated because of the larger number of subscribers (Willinsky and Alperin, 2011). The need to get new information out there quickly to the widest audience at the lowest price and have that information be cited is challenging. Enter the OA concept of publication.

What does OA mean? Essentially, OA is a way to provide free online journal articles to readers while supporting operations through financial models that permit this free electronic distribution. Because this is usually a paperless model (although hybrids exist), the turnaround is often much faster and cheaper than traditional publishing. However, some resources and funds are required for technical support as well as administrative costs, albeit less than those for a traditional print journal. Without these supports, an OA journal would not be able to support their website, peer and editorial reviews, sustainability, and growth (Daught, 2012; Williams-Jones et al., 2014).

OA business models are varied but usually available in two potential varieties: with a front-end fee or article-processing charge (APC) or no charge to authors. The APC model requires that once the article has been peer-reviewed and accepted for publication, the publisher’s costs are paid by the authors or authors’ research funder or institution. With the no charge to the authors model, the publishers fund their operations through sponsorship, advertising, voluntary labor, and/or by selling subscriptions for the printed form of the journal (Daught, 2012).

The OA fee-to-publish model has unfortunately resulted in an opportunity for so-called predatory journals that alter the OA model to exploit authors and enrich themselves (Beall, 2016; Murrell, 2016). These journals usually have a bogus editorial board, little or no scientific review, a complete lack of transparency, and little if any genuine ethical or publication guidelines. They fail to comply with publishing standards as set by the Committee on Publication Ethics, and their sole objective is to entice unaware authors to pay publication fees (Williams-Jones et al., 2014).

A practical and ethical case can be made in support of OA journals as a mechanism to ensure that manuscripts are made widely available and accessible to the widest audience of scholars worldwide as well as to interested members of the public (Willinsky and Alperin, 2011). First, publication in OA journals usually results in faster sharing of data than in traditional journals. This will ideally result in more rapid scientific progress and a reduction in duplication of scientific effort. Second, the lack of a subscription fee or fee to download an article will draw a larger audience (Parker, 2013; Watson, 2015; Williams-Jones et al., 2014). Third, research that is publically funded should be made freely available to the public who paid for it for reasons of accountability. OA publications inform and promote public discussion (Parker, 2013; Williams-Jones et al., 2014; Willinsky and Alperin, 2011). Fourth, commercial journals (and this can apply to both OA and traditional journals) have the potential to profit unfairly from the unpaid labor by academic researchers. Journal publication can be a potentially exploitative system that requires publicly funded academic researchers to submit their work to commercially for-profit journals. Academic researchers and clinicians willingly perform peer review and are members of editorial boards for no fee despite the fact
that the publishing company often profits from the final product. In contrast to OA journals, some of these commercially produced, traditional journals have the power to place restrictions on who has access to the knowledge and who is the knowledge producer while making a profit (Parker, 2013). Obviously, OA journals by definition do not restrict who has access to the information that they publish. Fifth, the subscription-based system has the potential to narrow and control scholarships. Their need to brand and market themselves as well as their ability to restrict publication formats has the potential to alter the final product (Williams-Jones et al., 2014). Finally, the publishers of traditional journals require that authors sign over the copyright of the published articles to the publisher, arguing that they bear the cost of producing and making the article available. Therefore, it is only fair that control over the use of the article stays with the publisher so that they can recoup their costs (Watson, 2015).

The fact is that OA offers another option or choice to publish your work. You now have more control than ever on where and how to publish your work. I have noticed that medical students and residents no longer carry large book bags the way I did. Their textbooks, journals, novels, and newspapers are now accessible online, and all they carry is a laptop computer or iPad tablet. OA publication fits their lifestyle and is the future! Although I was hesitant about this publishing format, I am now proud to be involved with an OA, nonpredatory, ethical journal like the International Journal of Women’s Dermatology.

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