

## ◆ *E-Journals: Still the Next Wave or Washed Up?*

*Moderator:*

**Bill Silberg**  
WebMD/Medscape  
New York, New York

*Speakers:*

**James Testa**  
Thomson ISI  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

**George D Lundberg**  
WebMD/Medscape General Medicine  
New York, New York

**Stevan Harnad**  
Cognitive Sciences Centre  
University of Southampton  
Highfield, UK

*Reporter:*

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Texas A&M University Press  
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Most major journals now have Web sites. Many journals appear in both print and electronic versions, and some emerging journals are exclusively electronic. The uncertainties of this shift toward online scientific communication drew a crowd of editors into heated discussion about the future of journals, both print and electronic, and possible ways to expand journal access in a digital era.

"You don't know where you're going unless you know where you are and where you've been", moderator Bill Silberg said as he introduced the speakers. Therefore, the session included presentations by James Testa and George D Lundberg. The two spoke about how they and their companies have adjusted to the growth of electronic journals. A controversial proposal by Stevan Harnad for increasing journal

access followed.

Thomson ISI is an indexing service that selects, indexes, and ranks journals. In his presentation, Testa said the selection of journals in electronic format is not very different from the selection and indexing of print journals. In both cases, selection is based on basic publishing standards, such as peer review and timeliness, editorial content, international diversity, and citation analysis. But indexing electronic journals has required some adjustments.

For example, it is essential that journals publish on time, Testa said. Typically, ISI must receive three issues of a journal on time before it is considered for inclusion in the index. However, many electronic versions publish individual articles as they are available. In those cases, ISI looks for a steady flow of articles over several months. If a journal has more than one version, ISI covers the most timely and complete one. Providing citations for electronic journals has also been a bit of a trick. Each article must have a unique page number or article number within the issue.

Lundberg commented on the growing number of journals, many of which are electronic. "The times, they are a changin'", he said with a laugh. He also discussed the power of search engines, such as Google, to find citations and provide access to growing numbers of research articles posted on the Web. Lundberg expressed a mistrust of information posted by researchers or their institutions. "You can most trust peer-reviewed journals", he said.

Harnad challenged what Lundberg had said and proposed authors' self-archiving of peer-reviewed, published articles as the best way to give researchers open access to research articles.

"E-journals are not really interesting any more", Harnad said. "That's not the

issue. The issue is access. As long as print journals and electronic journals are accessible only behind toll gates, nothing has changed."

No incentive exists for publishers of toll-based journals to begin providing open access, Harnad observed. "I propose that authors of papers already published in toll-access journals self-archive them in their own institutional e-print archives, openly accessible to all would-be users, to maximize their research impact", Harnad said. He then opened the discussion for questions and answers.

A member of the audience asked how researchers can know that self-archived articles that they access are identical with the peer-reviewed versions. Harnad said having access to otherwise inaccessible published research, even if it is only the author who says that the content matches the published version, would be incomparably better than having no access at all. But Lundberg said he didn't trust many authors, and he said he would prefer no access over access to articles that are not verifiably of peer-reviewed quality.

Many people also expressed concern that self-archiving might devalue existing journals. Harnad insisted that journals would persist because they provide at least one essential service—peer review. Others questioned the possible losses besides peer review. For example, as Lundberg pointed out, "one thing you can do in a journal that you cannot do in self-archive is take an editorial stance on issues that really matter."

Other issues that surfaced during the discussion included what physicians and other users want from online journals and the future of long-term archiving. 