Abstract

Introduction
On April 7, 2008, the previously voluntary National Institutes of Health (NIH) public-access policy became mandatory, requesting that the NIH-funded principal investigators (PIs) submit to PubMed Central (PMC) immediately upon publication the peer-reviewed copy of their article, which will then become available for public access through PMC no later than after a twelve-month embargo period.

Research questions
The questions this dissertation attempted to answer are:
1. Which factors motivate the NIH-funded PIs to publish in the PLoS open-access journals?
2. How do NIH-funded PIs perceive the NIH public-access policy?
3. How does the NIH public-access policy influence the PIs' publishing behavior?
4. How does the NIH public-access policy influence the PIs' decision to publish in open-access journals?

Methods
During the period March-May 2011, forty-two NIH-funded PIs who had published in one of the PLoS journals during the period 2005-2009 and who were affiliated with thirty-two academic institutions, research centers and hospitals around the United States were interviewed using Skype™ software. A random sampling from the RePORTER database was used for the selection of the participants. The participants were divided into two categories; the pre-mandate, who published in PLoS journals before the mandatory policy and the post-mandate, who published for the first time in one of the PLoS journals after the policy. During the interviews, a semi-structured interview protocol was followed, in which the PIs were asked to answer thirteen open-ended questions.

Discussion
From the pre-mandate participants (N=42, n=15) only five PIs were self-characterized as open-access advocates. From the post-mandate participants (N=42, n=27) the open-access advocates totaled fourteen. The data revealed that the vast majority of the PIs are not influenced by the NIH public-access policy in their publication preferences. Since a large number of journals comply with the terms of the policy, the PIs choose where they will publish their papers based on the journal quality, impact factor, readership, wide and fast article dissemination and quality of the work.

Major Findings

PLoS Publication Drive
The PIs publish in the PLoS journals because of their high impact factor, publication speed, fair peer-review system and the articles' open-access availability.

Open Access Awareness and the NIH policy
The PIs believed that their familiarity with the NIH policy and the broad development of the open-access journals, and more specifically of the PLoS journals, occurred simultaneously. It cannot be stated with confidence that the policy increased familiarity with the open-access journals.

The largest number of the participants mentioned that the mandatory NIH public-access policy did not increase their open-access awareness and did not cause a change in their publishing behavior. Since a large number of journals comply with the terms of the policy, the PIs choose where they will publish their papers based on the journal quality, impact factor, readership, wide and fast article dissemination and quality of the work.

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