

An Open Letter to the U.S. Congress Signed by 25 Nobel Prize Winners

August 26, 2004

Dear Members of Congress:

As scientists and Nobel laureates, we are writing today to express our strong support for the House Appropriations Committee's recent direction to NIH to develop an open, taxpayer access policy requiring that a complete electronic text of any manuscript reporting work supported by NIH grants or contracts be supplied to the National Library of Medicine's PubMed Central. We believe the time is now for all Members of Congress to support this enlightened policy.

Science is the measure of the human race's progress. As scientists and taxpayers too, we therefore object to barriers that hinder, delay or block the spread of scientific knowledge supported by federal tax dollars – including our own works.

Thanks to the Internet, today the American people have access to several billion pages of information, frequently about disease and medical conditions. However, the published results of NIH-supported medical research for which they already have paid are all too often inaccessible to taxpayers.

When a woman goes online to find what treatment options are available to battle breast cancer, the cutting-edge, peer-reviewed research remains behind a high-fee barrier. Families looking to read clinical trial updates for a loved one with Huntington's disease search in vain – because they do not have a journal subscription. Libraries, physicians, health care workers, students, researchers and thousands of academic institutions and companies are hindered by the costs and delays in making research widely accessible.

There's no question, open access truly expands shared knowledge across scientific fields -- it is the best path for accelerating multi-disciplinary breakthroughs in research.

Journal subscriptions can be prohibitively expensive. In the single field of biology, journals average around \$1,400 and the price is almost double that in chemistry. These already-high prices are rising fast, far in excess of inflation and the growth of library budgets. An individual who cannot obtain access to a journal in a library may buy copies of solo articles they need, but that can cost them \$30 or more for each article.

The National Institutes of Health has the means today to promote open access to taxpayer-funded research – through the National Library of Medicine. If the proposal put forth in the House of Representatives is adopted, NIH grantees may be expected to provide to the Library an electronic copy of the final version of all manuscripts accepted for publication, after peer review, in legitimate medical and scientific journals. At the time of publication, NIH would make these reports freely available to all through their digital library archive, PubMed Central (PMC).

There is widespread acknowledgement that the current model for scientific publishing is failing us. An increase in the volume of research output, rising prices and static library budgets mean that libraries are struggling to purchase subscriptions to all the scientific journals needed.

Open access, however, will not mean the end of medical and scientific journals at all. They will continue to exercise peer-review over submitted papers as the basis for deciding which papers to accept for publication, just as they do now.

In addition, since open access will apply only to NIH-funded research; journals will still contain significant numbers of articles not covered by this requirement and other articles and commentary invaluable to the

science community. Journals will continue to be the hallmark of achievement in scientific research, and we will depend on them.

The trend towards open access is gaining momentum. Japan, France and the United Kingdom are beginning to establish their own digital repositories for sharing content with NIH's PubMed Central. Free access to taxpayer funded research globally may soon be within grasp, and make possible the freer flow of medical knowledge that strengthens our capacity to find cures and to improve lives.

As the undersigned Nobel Laureates, we are committed to open access. We ask Congress and NIH to ensure that all taxpayers get their money's worth. Our investment in scientific research is not well served by a process that limits taxpayer access instead of expanding it. We specifically ask you to support the House Appropriations Committee language as well as NIH leadership in adopting this long overdue reform.

Signed by *Twenty Five Nobel Laureates*

| Name | Category of Nobel Prize Awarded | Year |
|--------------------|--|-------------|
| Peter Agre | Chemistry | 2003 |
| Sidney Altman | Chemistry | 1989 |
| Paul Berg | Chemistry | 1980 |
| Michael Bishop | Physiology or Medicine | 1989 |
| Baruch Blumberg | Physiology or Medicine | 1976 |
| Gunter Blobel | Physiology or Medicine | 1999 |
| Paul Boyer | Chemistry | 1997 |
| Sydney Brenner | Physiology or Medicine | 2002 |
| Johann Deisenhofer | Chemistry | 1988 |
| Edmond Fischer | Physiology or Medicine | 1992 |
| Paul Greengard | Physiology or Medicine | 2000 |
| Leland Hartwell | Physiology or Medicine | 2001 |
| Robert Horvitz | Physiology or Medicine | 2002 |
| Eric Kandel | Physiology or Medicine | 2000 |
| Arthur Kornberg | Physiology or Medicine | 1959 |
| Roderick MacKinnon | Chemistry | 2003 |
| Kary Mullis | Chemistry | 1993 |
| Ferid Murad | Physiology or Medicine | 1998 |
| Joseph Murray | Physiology or Medicine | 1990 |
| Marshall Nirenberg | Physiology or Medicine | 1968 |
| Stanley Prusiner | Physiology or Medicine | 1997 |
| Richard Roberts | Physiology or Medicine | 1993 |
| Hamilton Smith | Physiology or Medicine | 1978 |
| Harold Varmus | Physiology or Medicine | 1989 |
| James Watson | Physiology or Medicine | 1962 |