

Open access to *Journal of Physiotherapy*

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In 2014, as *Journal of Physiotherapy* enters its 60th year of publication, it will undergo one of the most significant developments in its history. From January 2014 the Australian Physiotherapy Association will provide open access to Editorials and all research articles published in *Journal of Physiotherapy*. A unique feature of the new publication model is that access to research content will be free for readers and its publication will be free for authors. This initiative is part of the Association's strategic plan.

For the last 60 years *Journal of Physiotherapy* has employed the same publishing model that is used by the overwhelming majority of scientific journals: journal content has been made available to those who pay for it. This means that, in addition to being made available to members of the Australian Physiotherapy Association, *Journal of Physiotherapy* has been accessible to staff of universities and hospitals with institutional subscriptions, individuals with personal subscriptions, and those prepared to pay for each article accessed. But that is all. Many potential readers never see the contents of the Journal.

The traditional publishing model is unsatisfactory from several perspectives. Research funding bodies invest enormous sums in research, researchers spend years conducting research, and patients volunteer to participate in research, all with the objective of improving clinical practice. But traditional publishing models restrict access to research findings behind pay walls, subscriptions, and user fees, making research findings accessible to only a few. Most research never reaches most of the people who would like to read about it.

In the last decade there has been a strong push towards open access publishing – the provision of unrestricted, free, online access to journal content. Open access has been advocated by researchers who want to provide broader access to the findings of their research (see, for example, <http://pkp.sfu.ca/about>). Recently open access has been mandated by several major research funding bodies. The US National Institutes of Health, the Wellcome Trust, the UK Medical Research Council, and the Australian NHMRC all now require that reports of research funded by these agencies are given open access within 12 months of the initial publication. There are compelling ethical arguments to prefer open access publishing over traditional publishing models (Parker 2013), and there is evidence from a randomised trial that open access articles are much more widely read (Davis 2010). Now open access publishing has become well established in some areas of science. That is a good thing because it enables wide dissemination of research findings to the clinicians and researchers and members of the general public who want to read about it.

One major hurdle has so far prevented all core physiotherapy journals (Costa et al 2010) from instituting open access policies: someone has to pay, and in open access models that is usually the author. All major open access journals charge authors a fee to publish, and the fee is usually substantial.

Publication fees present little problem when the research is supported by large grants, or by a pharmaceutical company, or by the producer of a medical device, but they constitute a real impediment to publication for physiotherapy researchers, many of whom conduct their research with little or no funding support. If any of the existing physiotherapy journals was to charge a publication fee it would find that the number of manuscripts submitted for publication dropped quickly. Consequently, while some non-core physiotherapy journals have embraced an open access model (www.doaj.org), and several core physiotherapy journals provide open access to content that is over one year old, none of the core physiotherapy journals (Costa et al 2010) has been made open access.

The Board of Directors of the Australian Physiotherapy Association has worked with the Editorial Board of *Journal of Physiotherapy* to create a new model of open access publishing in which (unlike in traditional publishing models) content is provided free to readers and (unlike existing open access models) publication is free to authors. The Association's Board of Directors recognises that if its flagship journal is to be the world's best physiotherapy journal it must exploit innovative publishing models. And the Association has embraced its role in providing the information infrastructure needed to support evidence-based practice. In this way the Australian Physiotherapy Association can build capacity in the physiotherapy profession in Australia, the region, and globally. The production and wide dissemination of a high quality journal is the ultimate demonstration to governments and health service providers that physiotherapy is a vibrant, research-based, scientific profession.

Journal of Physiotherapy has become one of the world's leading physiotherapy journals because it has established a reputation for providing high quality and rapid reviews for authors. There is empirical evidence that the quality of randomised trials of physiotherapy interventions published in *Journal of Physiotherapy* is higher than in any other journal (Costa et al 2010). For these reasons the journal has attracted high quality submissions and is highly cited. The adoption of this new publishing model should see a new phase of growth. We hope that researchers will submit their best research knowing that, from 2014, it will be more accessible and more widely read in *Journal of Physiotherapy* than in any other physiotherapy journal.

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Website

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