

## Editorial

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# The Importance of Open Access Journals in the Area of Public Health

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According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), “public health refers to all organized measures – whether public or private – to prevent disease, promote health, and prolong life among the population as a whole”. Thus, public health should be perceived as a system with three main functions: 1) assessment and monitoring of the communities’ health and populations at risk, 2) formulation of public policies designed to solve identified local and national health problems, 3) assuring that all populations have access to appropriate and cost-effective care, including health promotion and disease prevention services. Some examples of public health campaigns include: vaccination and control of infectious diseases, safety workplaces, safe and healthy food, safe drinking water, access to family planning, recognition of tobacco use as a health hazard. As a result of globalization, factors affecting public health in one country may come from outside state boundaries. Thus, special measures and attention are required to manage cross-border health risks, such as dangerous products.<sup>1</sup> Access to research on various aspects of public health is a key to successful implementation of public health policies and measures.

On the ISI Web of Knowledge (presently Thomson Reuters Web of Science) there are 23 journals with keyword “public health” in the title; among them, the highest 5-year Impact Factor is 7.365. The editors often recommend narrowing the research subject, linking in the titles public health with disaster medicine, environmental research, veterinary medicine, policy, dentistry, management and practice, ethics, nutrition, nursing, genomics, social work, tropical medicine. It reflects a broad spectrum of research aspects concerning public health problems. Some titles indicate focus on a selected region, e.g. “American”, “Asia-Pacific”, “Canadian”, “Central-European”, “Iranian”, “Scandinavian”, “Australian”, “New Zealand”, while some other are widened to “Pan-American” or even “global” scope. It shows that public health problems may have both local/specific and global/universal characters.

Now-a-days, most of the scientific work is disseminated in peer-reviewed journals. There are over 2.5 million papers published each year in 24,000 peer-reviewed journals. However, access to this research is closed to a large number of potential readers who cannot afford download payment. For example, a typical, single research paper costs about \$30 to \$50 to read, one journal issue - \$100-\$400, while the subscription costs may reach hundreds of dollars. Open access guarantees free and unrestricted online availability. The refereed journal articles are deposited in open online archives, and new journals do not invoke copyright to restrict access to the published material.<sup>2</sup> According to Francis and Taylor survey (conducted around the world amongst over 14 thousand authors of 2011 *via* email), the major advantages of open access include: wider circulation (38% strongly agreed, 33% agreed), faster publication times (23% strongly agreed, 38% agreed) and higher visibility than publication in a subscription journal (27% strongly agreed, 28% agreed).<sup>3</sup>

The importance of open access scientific journals in the area of public health has been recognized by many sources, as it can bring substantial benefits not only to academics, but also to the society and patients. There are several, real-life examples illustrating the need for open access to knowledge on public health and medicine. One story was reported by the President of Global Strategies for HIV, Arthur Amman, who met a physician from southern Africa, engaged in perinatal HIV prevention. He only had free access to abstracts of the research papers. Based

solely on the abstracts' conclusions, he altered the HIV prevention program in a way it was not so effective. The full text articles revealed incomplete data, small group and no applicability to this country situation.<sup>4</sup> Similar example was described by Yamey, who had met a professor of pediatrics during his trip to Africa.<sup>4</sup> The professor was asked by the WHO to investigate a mysterious "nodding disease" in Sudan. Before starting his investigation, he wanted to read all the research published on this disease. However, when he went online for the crucial papers, he was unable to read them because of high download costs.<sup>5</sup>

At present, there are over many open access journals available, but 10% of them are in the area of biology and medicine,<sup>2</sup> which also includes public health. The new journal – Public Health – Open Journal by Openventio, aims to cover a variety of issues pertaining to public health systems around the world, such as risk, epidemics, education plans, monitoring and analyses, health programs, communication, outbreaks and subsequent containment. It will be available not only to scientists and academics, but also to practitioners – health professionals, students and even to patients and other lay people, whoever will be interested in latest knowledge and reliable information on public health.

#### CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

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