

An Open Letter to the U.S. Congress Signed by 33 Nobel Prize Winners

September 9th, 2008

Dear Members of Congress:

As scientists and Nobel Laureates we are writing today to support the NIH Public Access Policy that was instituted earlier this year as a Congressional mandate. This is one of the most important public access initiatives ever undertaken. Finally, scientists, physicians, health care workers, libraries, students, researchers and thousands of academic institutions and companies will have access to the published work of scientists who have been supported by NIH.

For scientists working at the cutting edge of knowledge, it is essential that they have unhindered access to the world's scientific literature. Increasingly, scientists and researchers at all but the most well-financed universities are finding it difficult to pay the escalating costs of subscriptions to the journals that provide their life blood. A major result of the NIH public access initiative is that increasing amounts of scientific knowledge are being made freely available to those who need to use it and through the internet the dissemination of that knowledge is now facile.

The clientele for this knowledge are not just an esoteric group of university scientists and researchers who are pushing forward the frontiers of knowledge. Increasingly, high school students preparing for their science fairs need access to this material so that they too can feel the thrill of research. Teachers preparing courses also need access to the most up-to-date science to augment the inevitably out-of-date textbooks. Most importantly, the lay public wants to know about research findings that may be pertinent to their own health diagnoses and treatment modalities.

The scientific literature is our communal heritage. It has been assembled by the painstaking work of hundreds of thousands of research scientists and the results are essential to the pursuit of science. The research breakthroughs that can lead to new treatments for disease, to better diagnostics or to innovative industrial applications depend completely on access not just to specialized literature, but rather to the complete published literature. A small finding in one field combined with a second finding in some completely unrelated field often triggers that "Eureka" moment that leads to a groundbreaking scientific advance. Public access makes this possible.

The current move by the publishers is wrong. The NIH came through with an enlightened policy that serves the best interest of science, the scientists who practice it, the students who read about it and the taxpayers who pay for it. The legislators who mandated this policy should be applauded and any attempts to weaken or reverse this policy should be halted.

Name	Category of Nobel Prize Awarded	Year
David Baltimore	Physiology or Medicine	1975
Paul Berg	Chemistry	1980
Michael Bishop	Physiology or Medicine	1989
Gunter Blobel	Physiology or Medicine	1999
Paul Boyer	Chemistry	1997
Sydney Brenner	Physiology or Medicine	2002
Mario Capecchi	Physiology or Medicine	2007
Thomas Cech	Chemistry	1989
Stanley Cohen	Physiology or Medicine	1986
Robert Curl	Chemistry	1996
Johann Deisenhofer	Chemistry	1988
John Fenn	Chemistry	2002
Edmond Fischer	Physiology or Medicine	1992
Paul Greengard	Physiology or Medicine	2000
Roger Guillemin	Physiology or Medicine	1977
Leland Hartwell	Physiology or Medicine	2001
Dudley Herschbach	Chemistry	1986
Roald Hoffman	Chemistry	1981
H. Robert Horvitz	Physiology or Medicine	2002
Roger Kornberg	Chemistry	2006
Harold Kroto	Chemistry	1996
Roderick MacKinnon	Chemistry	2003
Craig Mello	Physiology or Medicine	2006
Kary Mullis	Chemistry	1993
Joseph Murray	Physiology or Medicine	1990
Marshall Nirenberg	Physiology or Medicine	1968
Paul Nurse	Physiology or Medicine	2001
Stanley Prusiner	Physiology or Medicine	1997
Richard Roberts	Physiology or Medicine	1993
Susumu Tonegawa	Physiology or Medicine	1987
Hamilton Smith	Physiology or Medicine	1978
Harold Varmus	Physiology or Medicine	1989
James Watson	Physiology or Medicine	1962

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