

Pros and Cons of Commercial Publishing Versus Self-publishing

Moderator:

Ana Marusic

Croatian Medical Journal
Zagreb, Croatia

Speakers:

Muza Gondwe

Malawi Medical Journal
Blantyre, Malawi

Mauricio Rocha e Silva

São Paulo University Medical College
São Paulo, Brazil

Adrian Stanley

The Charlesworth Group (USA), Inc
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Reporter:

Denise Shields

Obstetrics & Gynecology
Washington, DC

Adrian Stanley, of The Charlesworth Group, opened the session. The Charlesworth Group offers copyediting, composition, typesetting, printing, and rights and licensing agreements for more than 500 journals. Stanley noted that a commercial publisher is a for-profit entity, whereas an organization that self-publishes may hold nonprofit status and can be more mission-driven. Working with a commercial publisher can provide greater market power, more global staff resources, and opportunities to have higher-level, strategic, long-term plans that some smaller society publishers may not have the resources to achieve. The Charlesworth Group previously worked with a large commercial publisher to develop XML workflows. Stanley feels that his company would not have developed the new workflows as quickly if it had not worked with a commercial publisher. Commercial publishers are also able to take on large-scale projects with large organizations. In 2006, Springer and

China's Higher Education Press (HEP) began a 5-year partnership to co-publish a series of 27 journals titled *Frontiers in Selected Publications from Chinese Universities*.

Mauricio Rocha e Silva titled his portion of the session "Commercial versus Self-publishing as Seen by Someone Who Knows Next to Nothing about Commercial Publishing". He discussed self-publishing in Latin America and the Scientific Electronic Library Online (SciELO), a collection of more than 400 online, open-access journals based in Latin America and the Caribbean. He said that "SciELO is not a publisher but does a lot of what a publisher would do." SciELO journals are quite visible, receive more citations, and attract better science because of open access. SciELO organizations can be set up in any developing part of the world. The downside of the model is that SciELO journals operate on small budgets from government grants, and there is no subscription revenue.

Self-published Latin American journals are able to disseminate information on issues that might not be of interest to more developed, advanced nations. Having editorial control allows for increased visibility and promotes Latin American countries' status in the field of scientific publishing.

A journal with its own national sovereignty and editorial control is the *Malawi Medical Journal*, a quarterly self-published, peer-reviewed general medical journal that receives fewer than 100 submissions per year. Muza Gondwe spoke about the journal and its reasons for self-publishing.

The journal is able to control the editorial content and choose what information is most relevant to publish for Malawi professionals. Part of the journal's mission is to stimulate discussion among local health personnel. The journal is part of the African Health Journals Partnership (AHJP), which has given it opportunities

to participate in such initiatives as offering editor and reviewer workshops and developing a strategic plan.

The journal is the only medical journal in Malawi, so there is potential to make a profit. If it worked with a commercial publisher, it would not retain all the profits. Also, it is able to "exploit markets that a larger, commercial publisher would overlook or ignore". The journal's authors are relatively unknown to the international community, and the journal publishes information that pertains to their small geographic area. Gondwe said that the journal staff know their market and are committed to their work. A commercial publisher that publishes 100 titles, for example, does not have as much time to focus on a small journal. Self-publishing allows the staff to learn processes that they would not be exposed to if they worked with a commercial publisher. Gondwe has worked with the journal for more than a year, and within that time she has learned about XML and how to use a manuscript-tracking system.

Moderator Ana Marusic said that the *Croatian Medical Journal* self-publishes "because noncommercial publishing allows greater independence". In addition, "support with public funds is important for creating the environment for editors to succeed." 