

A NEW, ETHICAL MODEL FOR PEER-REVIEW PUBLISHING: FOR SCIENCE, BY SCIENTISTS

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INTRODUCTION

Peer-reviewed publishing is the cornerstone of scientific dissemination, ensuring that rigorous academic findings are accessible to stakeholders, providing an evidence-base to influence policy, practice, and achieve impact in targeted settings. In healthcare, and specifically in sports medicine, evidence-based findings can inform clinical decision-making and the development of interventions to reduce the risk of serious or fatal injury and illness. 'Real-world' examples of this include a 40% reduction in catastrophic head and neck injuries in youth rugby players through the implementation of a multi-modal injury prevention programme [1]. Furthermore, a series of studies found that survival rates from sudden cardiac arrest improved from 64% to 89% in student-athletes after the implementation of a programme to increase access of automated external defibrillators in American high-schools [2,3]. Whilst these are excellent case studies of how scientific research can be used to impact real-world outcomes, unfortunately, it can take up to 17 years for research to inform practice [4].

Academic publishing plays a role in the research-practice gap. It can often take months for an article to go through the peer-review process before being available online or in-print, if accepted at all. Even then, articles often sit behind a paywall, inaccessible to much of the intended audience. The systemic flaws with academic publishing will be known to anyone who has gone through the process in the capacity of an author, reviewer, or editor. *The Journal of Injury & Illness Prevention in Sport (JiIPS)* aims to deliver a more transparent, equitable, and efficient model for the betterment of science, researchers, clinicians, and patients.

1. LIMITATIONS OF THE TRADITIONAL PUBLISHING MODEL

Traditional publishing models generally prioritise profits over the timely dissemination of research. In 2024, the parent companies of Elsevier and

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Springer Nature, two of the largest publishers for sports-related journals, reported over £1 billion and £500 million in annual profits, respectively [5, 6]. Despite this, authors receive no remuneration for publishing their research, often relinquishing copyright to the journals, whilst reviewers receive no remuneration for their time and expertise. Most published articles sit behind a paywall or are only accessible through institutional subscriptions, unless authors wish to pay an open-access article processing charge in journals that provide a hybrid option.

A systematic review of biomedical journals found the mean time from submission to publication varied from 90-639 days, with much of this time spent in the review phase [7]. This time lag not only hampers the timely dissemination of scientific findings but also hinders researchers, especially those early on in their careers, whose academic progression and grant application success depend on publication outputs and the exposure and opportunities they afford. Time delays are an intrinsic byproduct of the traditional publishing model. Editors cite a shortage of available reviewers, with those who do accept often exceeding the tight review time frames set

often exceeding the tight review time frames set by journals. This is unsurprising given there is little to no incentive for reviewers to provide their time and expertise for free, and certainly under time-critical conditions. However, there is no motivation for publishers to change their highly profitable model given the economics involved. Criticisms of the traditional publication model were raised two decades ago in *The Scientist* [8], yet researchers are still offered few alternatives to publish their peer-reviewed work, and thus the cycle continues.

2. RATIONALE FOR JiiPS

The creation of *JiiPS* reflects a targeted response to these systemic inefficiencies in academic publishing, for the betterment of science and researchers. Our mission is to support the advancement of research in sports injury prevention, athlete health, rehabilitation, and implementation science by providing a publishing platform that is ethical, fast, and impactful.

Key features of *JiiPS* include:

- Expedited peer-review with a guaranteed desk decision within one week and peer-review completed within four weeks.
- Financial compensation for peer reviewers.
- Open access publication under a CC-BY license, ensuring unrestricted dissemination of published work
- Minimal formatting requirements at the time of submission, reducing the time burden for authors when preparing their manuscript

This model, which is sustainable through a modest article processing charge, aligns with growing calls for reform in academic publishing, including those outlined by the Budapest Open Access Initiative [9] and the Plan S initiative [10], which emphasize accessibility, fairness, and researcher-centred practices.

3. UPHOLDING ETHICAL STANDARDS THROUGH FAIR PRACTICE

At the core of *JiiPS* is a commitment to equity and transparency. The peer-review process is essential to scholarly validation, yet current models rely on voluntary labour. This not only places undue strain on the academic community but also contributes to significant delays and variability in review quality. *JiiPS* remunerates reviewers to acknowledge their expertise and incentivise timely, high-quality feedback. Importantly, payment is independent of the manuscript's outcome, so reviewers are not influenced to recommend a paper's acceptance.

For authors, we do not impose strict formatting requirements at submission given that this

accepted [11], our policy is to assess scientific merit first and apply formatting standards only upon acceptance. This approach ensures that if a paper is rejected, authors have not wasted valuable time formatting the manuscript for submission unnecessarily.

4. ACCELERATING PUBLISHING TIME FRAMES

The protracted pace of traditional publishing is detrimental to all, but especially early-career researchers. For those completing postdoctoral studies, fellowships, or applying for academic positions, month-long delays can equate to missed funding cycles, hiring rounds, or collaboration opportunities. By compensating reviewers and implementing firm timelines, *JiiPS* aims to reduce submission to peer-review decision times to under 30 days. This enables researchers to publish and disseminate their work and build their academic profiles more efficiently. This model also ensures that innovative research can be disseminated to relevant stakeholders promptly. This will hopefully reduce the research-practice gap, aiding the impact of evidence-based policy and interventions.

5. OPEN-ACCESS FOR REAL WORLD IMPACT

Access to research remains a pressing issue in sports medicine, where clinicians, practitioners, and policymakers may not have institutional subscriptions. By adopting a gold open-access model under the Creative Commons Attribution (CC-BY) license, *JiiPS* ensures that all published content is freely available and reusable, aligning with FAIR data principles and open science mandates [12].

Open-access publication facilitates broader dissemination, especially important in low-resource settings, evident by the fact that open-access papers are cited 18-47% more than those with restricted access [13]. Research should influence and inform clinical practice, preventative strategies, and health policies. However, to maximise impact it needs to be accessible to all.

THE FUTURE

JiiPS is not going to dramatically change a billion-pound industry any time soon, nor is that our aim. We want to provide a credible alternative to the traditional publishing model and demonstrate that there is a better, more efficient, ethical model whilst upholding the key principles of peer-review. Our aim is to accelerate research dissemination by remunerating reviewers and simplifying the

process for authors. In doing so, we hope to improve various outcomes for researchers, clinicians, and patients alike. We are excited for the potential impact *JiPS* can have, but we cannot do this alone. We invite the sports science and medicine community to support us as authors, reviewers, and readers.

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