Society news

Archive of medical journals to go online

The *Biochemical Journal* is among a selection of important and historically significant medical journals to be digitized and made freely available on the Internet.

The Wellcome Trust, the Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) and the US National Library of Medicine (NLM) are joining forces to digitize the complete backfiles of a number of journals. The content will be available on the Internet through PubMed Central (www.pubmedcentral.gov).

With an investment of £1.25 million (£750000 from the Trust and £500000 from the JISC), the project plans to digitize around 1.7 million pages of text. The NLM will manage the project, host the archive and ensure that the digital files are preserved.

The list of journals to be digitized will include the *Annals of Surgery*, *Biochemical Journal*, *Journal of Physiology* and *Medical History*. Digitization will start in the summer of 2004 and the first titles will be online early in 2005.

Once the backfiles are digitized, a significant new body of medical literature will be freely available on the Internet. Examples include:

- Research by Michell and colleagues (*Biochemical Journal*, 1983) and Berridge et al. (*Biochemical Journal*, 1984) that set the scene for all subsequent work leading to the demonstration that inositol 1,4,5-trisphosphate is a second messenger that releases calcium from intracellular stores – findings that have had a major impact in the field of cell signalling.
- Sydney Ringer's original research (published in the *Journal of Physiology* in the 1880s), on the actions of inorganic salts on living tissues; work that provided the theoretical basis for the development of saline infusion in clinical practice, a pre-requisite for most modern surgery.
- Robert Gross's and John Hubbard's reports on successful surgical repairs for congenital heart disease (*Annals of Surgery*, 1939).

In addition to creating a digital copy of every page, the digitization process will also create a pdf file for every discrete item (article, editorial, letter, advertisements etc.) in the archive, and use optical character recognition (OCR) technology to generate searchable text.

Although the project focuses on digitizing backfiles, publishers will also include new issues of the selected journals on an continuing basis subject to an embargo period, as defined by each participating publisher.

Dr Mark Walport, Director of the Wellcome Trust, warmly welcomed the project and said: "This international partnership will create an invaluable historic archive which will provide fascinating insights for today's research, teaching and clinical communities worldwide. This project is in close accord with the Trust's declared position on the desirability of open access to scientific literature".

"This is a major step in our continuing effort to preserve and freely make available an important segment of medical literature" said Donald A.B Lindberg, M.D., Director of the NLM. "The project is an example of truly useful international collaboration for the benefit of all."

Professor Sir Graeme Catto, President of the General Medical Council and Vice Principal of King's College London (host of JISC's London office), welcomed the announcement, saying: "I am delighted that the JISC–NLM–Wellcome Trust project will enable users to have free access to the back files of some of the UK's and US's most significant medical journals through PubMed Central. This innovative project will have important implications for the learning, teaching and research communities, but its commitment to open access will mean it has great importance beyond the education world too."

The Medical Journals Backfiles Digitisation Project is one of six digitization projects with funding for the Higher Education Funding Council (HEFCE). The overall programme, being managed by JISC, represents a total investment of some £10 million to be applied to delivering high-quality content online, including sound, moving pictures, census data and still images for long-term use by the further- and higher-education communities in the UK.

Further information about this project can be found at http://library.wellcome.ac.uk/backfiles

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