

New evidence shows PubMed Central undermines journal usage

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PubMed Central may draw readership away from biomedical journal sites, with this effect increasing over time. This finding—that PubMed Central directly competes with biomedical publishers—was published online in *The FASEB Journal*. In the study, Phillip M. Davis shows that as articles are deposited in PubMed Central, they draw readership away from the scientific journal even when journals themselves are providing free access to the articles. Over time, this may weaken the ability of journals to build communities of interest around research papers, impede the communication of news and events to scientific society members and journal readers, and ultimately reduce the perceived value of the journal to subscribers.

"I hope that studies like these will help inform the public debate on the effects of [open government](#) literature repositories on various stakeholders and aid in the formation of evidence-based public policy," said Philip M. Davis, Ph.D. Ithaca, New York.

To reach his conclusions, Davis conducted a longitudinal, retrospective cohort analysis of 13,223 articles published in 14 society-run biomedical research journals in nutrition, [experimental biology](#), physiology, and radiology between February 2008 and January 2011. He found that there was a 21.4 percent reduction in full text HTML article downloads and a 13.8 percent reduction in PDF article downloads from the journals' websites when NIH-sponsored articles become freely available from the PubMed Central repository. In addition, the effect of PubMed Central on reducing PDF article downloads is increasing over time, growing at a

rate of 1.6 percent per year. There was no longitudinal effect for full text HTML downloads.

"Traditionally, scientific societies published the [scholarly research](#) of their members in their own journals. This collegial nexus has been extended – some say disrupted – by the [centralization](#) of research reports in PubMed Central," said Gerald Weissmann, M.D., Editor-in-Chief of *The FASEB Journal*. "This report documents that PubMed Central, which duplicates the archives of most journals, draws readers away from the unique editorial flavor – and critical editorial comment - of the journals' websites. Essentially, PubMed Central has become a secondary site for the federal government to republish research text without context."

More information: Philip M. Davis. Public accessibility of biomedical articles from PubMed Central reduces journal readership—retrospective cohort analysis *FASEB J*.
[DOI:10.1096/fj.13-229922](https://doi.org/10.1096/fj.13-229922) ; www.fasebj.org/content/early/2013/04/03/fj.13-229922.full.pdf+html.

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