Publishing your research in BioMed Central journals

Michaela Torkar, PhD
Editorial Director, BioMed Central
Overview of Workshop

- Open access publishing
- BioMed Central and its journals
- Planning your publication
- Peer review process – what editors are looking for
- How to write a good manuscript
About BioMed Central

• First open access publisher
• >130,000 articles published in >240 open access journals
• Every research article is:
  - Peer reviewed
  - Freely and immediately accessible to everyone
  - Archived in PubMed Central and other archives
• Many journals are:
  - Indexed in MEDLINE, Biosis (all biology titles)
  - Tracked by Thomson-Reuters for Impact Factors
The changing landscape of open access publishing

2000

2012

BioMed Central
The Open Access Publisher

PLOS

BioMed Central
The Open Access Publisher

Blackwell Publishing
Online Open

ccAction Publishing

Hindawi

SpringerOpen

SAGE open
welcometrust

DOVE Medical Press

mBio

Cell Reports

SCIENTIFIC JOURNALS INTERNATIONAL

eLIFE

EXIS Open Choice

ACS Author Choice Free Access

WILEY Open Access

Libertas Academica

FEBS openbio
Open access journals in 2012

- 8300 open access journals
- 1200 open access journals indexed in the Journal Citation Reports
What is ‘open access’?
The old world of access to knowledge
The new world of access to knowledge
Are open access journals different from subscription journals?

**Same quality and standards**
- Peer review
- Editors in chief
- Editorial boards
- Indexing

**Distribution is different**
- No subscription barriers
- Universal access
- Openly licensed to allow reuse
What is different for authors?

**Traditional journals**
- Researchers transfer their copyrights to the publisher
- Publisher covers costs by selling access to the content

**Open access journals**
- No exclusive rights retained by the publisher
- Publisher is paid for the service of publication
Article-processing charge (APC) covers

- **Editorial**: peer review, administrative support, commissioning, journal development etc.
- **Technical**: development, maintenance and operation of online journal system
- **Production**: formatting and mark-up of articles, inclusion in indexing services
- **Marketing**: making sure readers and authors know about the journal
- **Customer service**: responding to authors/readers

Web technology keeps costs low
Many funders with open access mandates, e.g.:

- Wellcome Trust
- US National Institutes of Health
- Howard Hughes Medical Institute
- European Research Council

Many universities require open access, e.g.:

- Harvard University

**BioMed Central** institutional memberships help authors with APCs, e.g.:

- Chinese Academy of Sciences
It is a world-wide trend
Advantages of open access

• Continuous publication – not limited by print deadlines
• No limits on size, number of colour figures, videos, additional files – not limited by page numbers
• Very focused on author satisfaction – happy authors submit again
• High-quality peer review
• Focus on increasing visibility of articles through blogs, blurbs, tweets
• Articles can be widely reused
• Allows text mining of data and literature
Open access publishing

Any questions?

We covered:

• Open access is growing!

• Differences between subscription and open access journals

• General advantages for authors and readers

• Article-processing charges

• Research funders and Open access mandates
BioMed Central’s journals
The **BMC** series

- Pioneering series of 60+ open access journals
- Spanning all of biology and medicine
- As a whole function as a ‘megajournal’
- Academic Section Editors and Associate Editors handle peer review
- 2000+ submissions per month
- Publish sound science; separate evaluation of ‘soundness’ from ‘interest’
• Broader interest titles within the BMC-series
• Flagship journals: cascade of articles to specialist BMC-series journals
• Publish research and actively commission reviews, commentaries, Q&As
‘Hybrid journals’

• Broad-interest research, reviews, comments, meeting reports.
• **ALL** research is open access. Non-research articles are only for subscribers
• Several very established titles
• Leading journals within their fields – e.g. *Genome Biology* (IF 9.06)
Academic and society journals

- Academic and clinical Editors-in-Chief
- Many society journals
- Some leading journals within their fields – e.g. *Veterinary Research* ranks highest amongst veterinary sciences journals
All journals have high-standard peer-review processes:

- 2-3 independent expert reviewers
- Statistical referees where needed
- Editors-in-Chief, editorial board members and referees are prestigious academics and clinicians
- Acceptance rates are on average 45-55%
- Some highly selective journals with acceptance rates <10%
Publishing in BioMed Central gives high visibility

- Over 1.5 million registrants (14,000 new registrants each month)
- 390,000 BioMed Central email update recipients
- Over 5 million user sessions each month
- 32 million page views per month
Visibility: most accessed articles

1. **Research**  Open Access  **Highly accessed**
   54330 Accesses
   Multiple-center evaluation of mortality associated with acute kidney injury in critically ill patients: a competing risks analysis
   Christoph Clec'h, Frédéric Gonzalez, Alexandra Lautrette, Molière Nguile-Makao, Maité Garrouste-Orgeas, Samir Jamali, Dany Colgan-Toledano, Adrien Descorps-Decleré, Frank Chemouni, Rebecca Hamidfar-Roy, Elie Azoulay, Jean-François Timis
   *Critical Care* 2011, 15:R128 (17 May 2011)
   Abstract | Full text | PDF | PubMed | Cited on BioMed Central

2. **Review**  Free  **Highly accessed**
   30484 Accesses
   Clinical review: Acid–base abnormalities in the intensive care unit – part II
   Lewis J Kaplan, Spiros Frangos
   Abstract | Full text | PDF | PubMed | Cited on BioMed Central

3. **Research**  Open Access  **Highly accessed**
   25052 Accesses
   Acute renal failure – definition, outcome measures, animal models, fluid therapy and information technology needs: the Second International Consensus Conference of the Acute Dialysis Quality Initiative (ADQI) Group
   Rinaldo Bellomo, Claudio Ronco, John A Kellum, Ravindra L Mehta, Paul Palevsky, the ADQI workgroup
   *Critical Care* 2004, 8:R204-R212 (24 May 2004)
   Abstract | Full text | PDF | PubMed | Cited on BioMed Central | 1 comment | F1000 Medicine | F1000 Biology
High impact through thematic series

- Commissioned collections of reviews built around a ‘hot’ topic, written by key experts. Plus research articles from the whole community.

- Added attention through strong association with other content in the series, promotional activities. Cross-journal series’ reach multiple readerships.
Promoting your research

- Press releases, BMC Update, Blogs, Twitter...
- Annual research awards (e.g. Public Health and Health Services Research award)
- Research highlights/Commentary

“In a recent article published in *BMC Immunology*, Qu et al. demonstrated…”
High impact through BioMed Central’s conferences

Challenges in Malaria Research
Progress towards elimination
10 – 12 October 2012
Basel, Switzerland

BioMed Central, in conjunction with its journals *Malaria Journal* and *Parasites & Vectors*, is hosting the second malaria conference "Challenges in Malaria Research: Progress Towards Elimination" in Basel, Switzerland from 10 – 12 October 2012.

Following the success of the inaugural malaria conference in 2010, entitled "Parasite to Prevention: Advances in the understanding of malaria", this second conference will bring together leading malaria researchers to review current progress and to chart future challenges.

Internationally renowned speakers will present their insights into malaria elimination, including social science and policies, Artemisinin resistance, new drugs, vaccines, diagnostic challenges and vector controls.

- All participants are invited to submit abstracts for oral and poster presentations
- Highly topical scientific program
- Internationally renowned invited speakers and organizing committee
High impact through BioMed Central’s conferences
High impact through BioMed Central’s conferences

Challenges in Malaria Research

Beyond the Genome 2012

27 – 29 September 2012
Harvard Medical School, Boston, USA

www.beyond-the-genome.org

Beyond the Genome

Beyond the Genome in collaboration with the journal Retrovirology, which celebrates its 10th anniversary in 2013, will host the third biennial Frontiers of Retrovirology conference, 16-18 September 2013 at Churchill College, Cambridge, UK.

Following the success of the first two Frontiers of Retrovirology conferences in 2009 and 2011, this third meeting, held in the historic university city of Cambridge, will bring together leading researchers in human and animal retroviruses to review current progress and to chart future challenges.

At Frontiers of Retrovirology 2013, internationally renowned speakers will present their insights into the principles guiding the life cycle of endogenous retroelements, complex human retroviruses, and their pathogenic interactions with their hosts, forming part of a highly topical and diverse scientific program.

All participants are invited to submit abstracts for oral and poster presentations. Submitted abstracts will be published as a supplement in Retrovirology (Impact Factor 6.47) and indexed in PubMed and by ISI Web of Science.

Registration is limited – Register your interest in this conference here to be the first to know when registration opens!
Publishing in BioMed Central

Any questions?

We covered:

• Different types of journals published by BioMed Central

• Visibility to research published in BioMed Central

• Some promotional activities to give top research additional exposure
How to get your research published

1. Experimental design – plan your publication from the start
2. Choose the right journal
3. Understand the peer review process
4. Prepare a ‘good’ manuscript
Get your research published: Planning ahead

Key sections in research articles reflect scientific process:

Background
Methods and materials
Research/data
Discussion/interpretation
References

A randomized controlled trial of qigong for fibromyalgia

Mary Lynch, Jana Sawynok, Chok Hiew and Dana Marcon

Abstract

Introduction: Fibromyalgia is difficult to treat and requires the use of multiple approaches. This study is a randomized controlled trial of qigong compared with a wait-list control group in fibromyalgia.

Methods: One hundred participants were randomly assigned to immediate or delayed practice groups, with the
Get your research published: Planning ahead

Experimental design – get it right:

[Background]
What is your hypothesis or research question? What are the aims of your study?

[Methods and materials]
Which methods are appropriate to answer your questions? Do you need ethics approval and/or patient consent? Do you need to register a clinical trial? Do it now!

...
Experimental design – get it right:

[Research/data]
What are the right controls?
Are the sample sizes \( (n) \) large enough?
Which statistical tests?

...
Experimental design – get it right:

[Discussion/interpretation]
What do the results really show?
How does this fit with existing knowledge?

[References]
What is new about the findings?
Whose research would be affected by this and why?
Get your research published: Planning ahead

Critically assess your results:
Database searches, e.g. PubMed, GoogleScholar, Scopus
Related literature listings
Get your research published: Before you start writing...

**What’s a valuable contribution?**
- New and original results or methods/tools
- Reanalysis or reinterpretation of published data
- Metareviews (clinical studies)
- Reviews of a particular subject
- Negative results can be of value too

**You should not knowingly publish:**
- Work that is out of date
- Flawed or manipulated data
- Duplication of previously published work
Get your research published: Before you start writing...

Publication and research ethics

Do NOT...
• Multiple submissions
• Plagiarism
• Improper author contribution
• Data fabrication and falsification
• Improper use of human subjects and animals
Get your research published: Before you start writing...

Publication and research ethics guidelines:
• ICMJE: International Committee of Medical Journal Editors
• CONSORT: Consolidated Standards of Reporting Trials
• COPE: Committee on Publication Ethics
• WMA Declaration of Helsinki
Consequences of unethical behaviour:

- Unable to publish in the future
- (some) journals ban authors
- Loss of reputation
- Loss of employment
- Studies without ethical approval (where needed) are rejected
Avoid problems:

• Register trials, get ethics approval
• Agree author contribution at the start
• Acknowledge writing/editorial support
• Declare all conflicts of interest
• Make sure all authors see manuscripts before submission (and resubmission)
  
  • FASTER PUBLICATION
  • BETTER JOURNALS
  • LESS TIME AND COST
Planning your publication

Any questions?

We covered:

• Things to consider for experimental design and during result collection

• Publication and research ethics and how to avoid problems
Get your research published: Choosing a journal

What are the most important factors for most authors?

• Prestige of the journal
• Target readership
• Visibility
• Speed of peer-review process
• Open access...
What do editors and reviewers look for?

- Does the work fit within the journal’s scope?
- Is it sound science?
- What’s new and useful/interesting?
- Is it a big enough step forward for *this* journal’s readership? Note: some journals are more selective than others.
Get your research published: Choosing a journal

Interest levels vary between journals:

- **High threshold:**
  - Significant advance
  - Results and insights of wider interest/can be generalised
  - Resources, methods need to be widely useable
  - Conclusions must be strong

- **Low threshold:**
  - Advance can be small
  - Results and insights of interest to a specialised group
  - Conclusions can be ‘weaker’ – e.g. statistical less strong, caveats about limitations of a study, missing controls etc.
Choosing the target journal: how

• Honestly evaluate your findings:
  How big an advance are your findings?
  How high can you realistically aim?

• Check aims and scope of several journals:
  Who reads them?
  Who publishes in them?
  What type of studies have they published recently?
Finding the major journals that publish studies in your area of research

Journal prestige:
- Impact factors
- SciMago rankings
- Editorial board
About *Genome Medicine*

**What is *Genome Medicine*?**

*Genome Medicine* is an online peer-reviewed journal which publishes open access research articles of outstanding quality in all areas of medicine studied from a genomic or post-genomic perspective. The journal has a special focus on the latest technologies and findings that impact on the understanding and management of human health and disease.

In addition to publishing high-quality research, *Genome Medicine* serves the international research community as a forum for the discussion and critical review of information about all areas of medicine informed by genomic research.

Subjects include, but are not limited to:

- Significant advances in the understanding of the genetics, genomics, and epigenetics of disease
- Computational and systems approaches, including proteomics, metabolomics and transcriptomics, to the understanding and management of disease
- Genomic epidemiology and public health genomics
- The application of genomic and post-genomic technologies to clinical practice, with special emphasis on diagnostics and therapeutics
How to judge a journal’s visibility: GoogleRankings

Similarly:
- Cell Biology
- Molecular Biology
- Systems Biology
- Bioinformatics
- Developmental Biology

All on first page of Google results.
How to judge a journal’s visibility: Article accesses/alternative metrics
How to choose the right journal

Any questions?

We covered:

• How to find journals in your field
• Journals have different aims and scope
Understanding the peer review process

• Who makes the decisions
• Step-wise process
• Frequent reasons for rejections
Editorial structures vary greatly across our journals. Two basic principles:

- **Professional in-house editors**
  - Scientifically trained (usually to PhD/MD level)
  - Now full-time work on journals
  - Supported by ed boards and other experts

- **External academic editors**
  - Practicing scientists and clinicians
  - Established experts in their field
  - Working closely with associate editors, delegating to ed boards
Find out about the editorial model from the journal’s information pages
Key steps in the peer-review process

Step 1: Manuscript submission:

- Usually online
- Read Instructions for authors and journal policies before submission
- Submitting author takes responsibility for ‘agreeing’ to terms and conditions
Key steps in the peer-review process

Step 1: Manuscript submission: Presubmission enquiries (some journals)

Advantages:
Usually quick response
Important for journals with large submission numbers
Initial agreement of the editors to consider the manuscript for peer review – first hurdle taken

Usually required:
Well-written abstract outlining key questions, results and novel insights
Detailed cover letter, explaining significance of new insights, methods used and data presented
Key steps in the peer-review process

**Step 1: Manuscript submission:** Cover letter

- Important first impression!
- Address to the editor personally
- Provide manuscript title and publication type (research, review etc)
- Background, rationale, description of results
- Explain importance of your findings: Why would they be of interest to the journal's target audience?
- Provide corresponding author details
Key steps in the peer-review process

Step 1: Manuscript submission: Recommending reviewers
- Experts with good publication records – in areas covered in the manuscript
- From your reading and references
- Do not recommend your collaborators or close colleagues

Excluding reviewers:
- Provide good reasons for excluding: e.g. Close competition
- Do not exclude more than 2-3 people
Get your research published: peer review

Key steps in the peer-review process

Step 1: Manuscript submission

Step 2: Initial manuscript assessment
* Journal scope
* Potential interest level
* Policies (ethics, data availability etc)
* Novelty, including plagiarism/duplication
* Basic quality of language and presentation (mostly abstract, figures etc)

**Initial decision:**
- send for peer review
- reject as not suitable for this journal
Get your research published: peer review

Key steps in the peer-review process

Step 1: Manuscript submission
Step 2: Initial manuscript assessment

Step 3: Peer review stage
Usually 2-4 experts, depending on expertise required
(specific methods, statistics, knowledge of literature and field)
Often many experts need to be invited; good experts are busy.
Peer reviewers provide recommendations and advice on
- Novelty
- Soundness (appropriate methods, controls, support for conclusions)
- Interest levels
Key steps in the peer-review process

Step 1: Manuscript submission
Step 2: Initial manuscript assessment
Step 3: Peer review stage

**Step 4: Editorial decision:**
The editor integrates the information received from different experts.
This is not a democratic process! ALL important issues must be resolved.

**First decision:**
- Accept manuscript – manuscript goes to Production
- Invite revisions (major/minor) – revised manuscript may need to go through steps 1-4 again
- Reject
Peer review process

Any questions?

We covered:

• Step 1: Manuscript submission
• Step 2: Initial assessment
• Step 3: Peer reviewers
• Step 4: Decision to publish or not
Frequent reasons for rejections

Reason 1: Results are not sound

Further controls needed:
• Positive control: a sample that is known to give a result (shows the method is working)
• Negative control: a ‘normal’ sample that shouldn’t show the result

Patient samples are usually compared with healthy samples.
Mutants (animal strains, cell lines etc) with non-mutants (that are identical except for the mutation).
Sometimes there is debate over what is the appropriate control.
Frequent reasons for rejections

Reason 1: Results are not sound

Further statistical analysis needed:
• Statisticians advise on the appropriate tests
• Sample sizes are too small to give meaningful results.
• Difference between quantitative and qualitative studies.
Most biological studies are quantitative/numerical studies.
If datasets are large and/or the results are not measured in “yes” or “no”, but in levels of signal etc, then formal statistical analysis is required.
Frequent reasons for rejections

Reason 1: Results are not sound

Methods used are inappropriate:
• Methods used are not state-of-the-art: more sensitive/accurate methods are available
• Methods used are known to have limitations under the conditions used here
Reason 2: Interpretations are wrong or overstated

Key references/relevant previous studies ignored:
• The submitted work is not novel
• Published information about limitations (e.g. specificity) of methods and reagents is not included: can the data with this method/reagents be trusted?
• References are mostly old: has recent work been ignored or is no one interested in this field?
Get your research published: peer review

Frequent reasons for rejections

Reason 2: Interpretations are wrong or overstated

Arguments/models not supported by data:
• The new findings don’t fit with existing knowledge/accepted models in the field. Is there an explanation?
• The new findings contradict previous publications. There must be very strong evidence (good controls etc) that the new findings are the correct ones.
Frequent reasons for rejections

Reason 3: Findings are not a big enough advance

Previous publications showed similar results:
- A new method doesn’t give better results than another, published method
- A specific finding has already been reported in a similar organism.
- Case reports: a single patient with a common disease and previously reported symptoms.
Reason 3: Findings are not a big enough advance

Conclusions are not strong:
• Sample sizes are small, controls are not comprehensive and results are overstated.
Toning down the conclusions makes it too weak for a high-profile journal.
Frequent reasons for rejections

Reason 4: Findings are ‘not interesting’ enough

Not of broad enough appeal, doesn’t meet the journal’s threshold:
• Only of interest to a small group of researcher and/or a specific community (e.g. ‘only’ of interest to structural chemists)
• Journal is highly selective in certain areas
Frequent reasons for rejections

Reason 5: Ethical concerns

Lack of ethical approval:
• Research carried out on humans must comply with Helsinki declaration
• Experimental research on animals must follow internationally recognized guidelines (stringent rules in UK)
• Patients must give consent in advance of research.
• Procedures must conform with recognised standards; if protocols are changed, an explanation must be provided.
Frequent reasons for rejections

Reason 5: Ethical concerns

Reporting guidelines not followed:
• Trials should be registered before the study starts; Trial Registration Numbers should be included in the manuscript
• Reporting guidelines: EQUATOR network
• Prescriptive checklists: MIBBI portal
Frequent reasons for rejections

Reason 5: Ethical concerns

Plagiarism and duplication:
• Plagiarism: It’s never acceptable to copy and paste any text (however small) from a previous publication – not even your own. Many publishers use CrossCheck to detect plagiarism.
• Duplication: The manuscript must be original and present new work and data that have not been published.
• If previously published methods, material, models, arguments are used, a reference to the original source must be included every time the information is repeated.
Frequent reasons for rejections

Reason 6: Badly presented manuscript

Referees and editors cannot understand the work:
• Unclear descriptions of why the study was conducted, what analysis methods were used and what new results were obtained.
• Figures and tables are difficult to follow
• Badly referenced
Rejection ≠ Rejection: Separating ‘scientific soundness’ from ‘interest levels’

Scientific soundness
- Results are not sound
  - Interpretation is fundamentally flawed
  - Ethical concerns
- Manuscript cannot be published (in its current form)

Interest levels
- Not in scope for this journal
- Not a big advance
- Not of interest to this journal’s readership
- Manuscript suitable for a more specialised journal
  - Transfer offered
Get your research published: peer review

Peer-review cascade (example)

Transfers of reviewers’ reports:
- Avoids delays for authors
- Avoids wasting the time of peer reviewers
- Separates scientific soundness of research from level of interest
Frequent reasons for rejections

Any questions?

We covered:

• Reasons for rejections

• Journal cascades and transfers of reports
Finally...

Tips for writing a good manuscript
Check journal-specific policies and instruction for authors!
Journal-specific policies

1) Ethical policies: particularly (but not only!) relevant for medical journals
   - Registration of trials
   - Guidelines for authors from pharmaceutical companies
   - Patient consent forms etc

2) Availability of data:
   - Deposition of raw microarray and proteomic datasets
   - Free software

3) Availability of related submitted manuscripts

4) “Data not shown” allowed?

There are many others...
Check the journal information pages!
Attention: Title

- Specific and short
- Broad appeal: avoid unnecessary detail
- Avoid abbreviations
- Reviewers and editors will ask whether the title accurately reflects the content of the manuscript
- Consider keywords!

A good title will help attract readers and citations!
Attention: Abstract

• Specific information about:
  - Aim(s) of the study. Why are the questions important?
  - Main methods and materials used
  - Key results presented and
  - Conclusions drawn.
• Bear indexing and searching in mind:
  Use keywords that will attract readers

A badly written and unclear abstract might mean
- that the editor misses the importance of the work
- that invited referees decline to review the manuscript
Attention: Figures, tables AND their legends!

- Main results and data should be shown with illustrations: many readers (and editors!) will look at the figures and tables without reading the whole article.
- Figure layout clear and logical (e.g. top to bottom or clockwise arrangement of components).
- All components in the figure labeled and described in the legend.
- Enough detail in the legend for readers to understand what type of data and analyses are presented and what the key results are.
• Science is often complex: use simple language

• Ask your colleagues for feedback

• Copyediting/Author services: BioMed Centraal partnership with Edanz
Why peer review?

- Peer review ensures that your paper is as scientifically robust and complete as possible.
- An opportunity to improve your contribution, not an inconvenience!
- If rejected: take criticism on board before submitting to another journal!
- Do you want to see it ‘in action’?

Open peer review
MP470, a novel receptor tyrosine kinase inhibitor, in combination with Erlotinib inhibits the HER family/PI3K/Akt pathway and tumor growth in prostate cancer

Wenqing Qi*, Larry S Cooke, Amy Stejskal, Christopher Riley, Kimiko D Croce, Jose W Saldaña, David Barnes, and Daruka Mahadevan

* Corresponding authors: Wenqing Qi wenqing@email.arizona.edu · Daruka Mahadevan dmahadevan@asec.arizona.edu

1 Arizona Cancer Center, the University of Arizona, Tucson, AZ 85724, USA
2 National Institute for Medical Research, Mill Hill, London, UK
3 SuperGen, Inc. Dublin, CA 94558, USA

For all author emails, please log on.


The electronic version of this article is the complete one and can be found online at:
http://www.biomedcentral.com/1471-2407/9/142

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**Pre-publication history**

**MP470, a novel receptor tyrosine kinase inhibitor, in combination with Erlotinib inhibits the HER family/PI3K/Akt pathway and tumor growth in prostate cancer**

Wenging Qi*, Larry S Cooke, Amy Stejskal, Christopher Riley, Kimiko D Croce, Jose W Saldanha, David Bearss and Daruka Mahadevan

* Corresponding authors: Wenging Qi wenging@email.arizona.edu - Daruka Mahadevan dmahadevan@azcc.arizona.edu


Pre-publication versions of this article and reviewers' reports

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Thank you!

Michaela Torkar, PhD
Editorial Director, BioMed Central
michaela.torkar@biomedcentral.com

Local BioMed Central contacts:

王丹青
Tel: 010-82670211-856
Fax: 010-8267022
Email: diane.wang@biomedcentral.com

王玉彪
Tel: 010-82670211-858
Fax: 010-8267022
Email: frank.wang@biomedcentral.com
BioMed Central’s activities in China

• Journals:
  - Infectious Diseases of Poverty (the National Institute of Parasitic Diseases)
  - GigaScience (Beijing Genomics Institute)
  - Cell Regeneration (Guangzhou Institute of Biomedicine and Health, Chinese Academy of Sciences)
  - Journal of Clinical Bioinformatics (Fudan University Zhongshan Hospital)
  - Cell & Bioscience (SCBA)
  - Translational Neurodegeneration (Ruijin Hospital)
  - Journal of Animal Science and Biotechnology (China Agricultural University)

• Expansion of Editorial boards

• Chinese institutes with BioMed Central membership:
  - Chinese Academy of Sciences
  - Shanghai Jiaotong University School of Medicine

• Author workshops

• Partnership with author service (Edanz)