Coronavirus: an idea to identify articles that aren't OA yet, but could be

Posted by Heather Morrison/ 2020 Mar31

As posted to the Global Open Access List, scholcomm and the radical open access list, following is a suggestion for how to identify articles on coronavirus that are not yet open access. The majority of these articles will be in journals that allow author self-archiving, and some may be published by authors covered by open access policies. Communication with authors and/or journals may be helpful to improve the percentage of open access.

A PubMed search for "coronavirus" limited to the past 10 years then limited again to free full-text yields results of 55% free full-text. With no date limit, it's 46%.

This search will get at research on COVID and the next most relevant research, all the other coronaviruses (mers, sars, common cold), and will be helpful for researchers and medical practitioners anywhere.

China's early release of the COVID genetic code and even traditional publishers scrambling to make COVID resources free is demonstrating that people get at least some of the points of open access and open research.

It would be interesting to compare publisher responses today with earlier epidemics. If I recall correctly, there is a significant change from responding to pressure to proactively making resources free without OA pressure.

This is progress. It's not 100% OA but a lot more researchers and practitioners have free access to a lot more of our knowledge than was the case with the 2003 Sars epidemic.

Further pressure might be helpful. Identification and analysis of the 45% PubMed results that are coronavirus but not free full-text would identify suitable targets for gentle pressure. Some such articles may have been written by authors covered by an OA policy. Such a results list would likely yield journal lists and individual articles, many of which could be deposited in repositories thanks to the efforts of green OA advocates.

Librarians and others working from home can send e-mails to authors and it should be possible to add items to repositories remotely. Publishers who are green not gold should ideally work with PMC and can also send e-mails to authors reminding them of the green policy.

Although research on coronavirus is urgent, university researchers who are also teachers are likely swamped due to a sudden shift to online teaching this semester. For this group, it might make sense to time communication after the semester ends.

Just some ideas…

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