

The end of a (short) line

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ABSTRACT.

This is the last issue of Bioscience Hypotheses. In a short time we have demonstrated the demand for, and the value of, publishing hypotheses in the life sciences using an editorial choice model. I hope that others can build on our lessons of scientific and commercial success.

TEXT

This is the last issue of Bioscience Hypotheses. The journal started publishing in 2008, so in the world of commercial publishing it has been a meteor, flashing brightly in the intellectual sky and then gone. A lot of people have asked me why we are closing down.

It is not because of failure. In its brief time Bioscience Hypotheses published 180 original research articles, and around 26,000 people were sufficiently interested in them to download a full PDF from Elsevier's web site. We generated wide interest in the scientific and general press, and only annoyed some people.

It was not because it was politically unacceptable or contentious. Our sister journal is under systematic attack from political groups at the moment (I will not dignify the slanging match in the blogosphere by citing it here), but apart from a few commentators calling a few of our papers idiotic, Bioscience Hypotheses has been generally well received.

But we are part of a much larger publishing enterprise, and policy shifts within that enterprise have rendered Bioscience Hypotheses untenable. Sorry, ladies and gentlemen, but it has to go.

It is so rare to actually close anything down in academic research that I cannot find a precedent for what to say. Inaugural editorials abound. Changes of name, direction, focus, editor, all these things are common. But actually *stopping* something seems rare. This is not just in publishing. All research generates an institutional momentum that makes organizations look like living entities striving to survive. Were all those 'Genome Centers' closed down with the publication of the human genome? No, they found other genomes to sequence (including hundreds, and then thousands, of more human genomes), or turned themselves 'functional genomics' centers (doing what we biochemists used to call 'biochemistry'). When physiology became unfashionable in the 1970s departments of physiology did not say 'Oh, well, let's go home'. They

turned themselves into Departments of Molecular Physiology', and carried on. Now they are turning themselves into Departments of Systems Biology, or Centers for Translational Medicine. It seems hard to admit that the world has changed, and one is no longer needed. Can you name a researcher who has said "I aimed to find out [insert the answer to the question of your choice], and I have, so now I am retiring"? The quest for truth is, after all, never ending.

I admit it, though. Bioscience Hypotheses is closing down. Ending. No successor, no new title or new policy. Just turning out the lights and putting the chairs up on the table. So this last editorial is paradoxically breaking new ground: what does one write? As we cannot look forward to a bright future, I will peer back and see if we had a bright past. What, if anything, did Bioscience Hypotheses achieve?

We got some good ideas into print. Some are starting to be cited, which is impressive as we are not listed in several major scientific databases. The aim of the journal was to put new ideas into the public domain to be discussed, tested, dismissed if necessary, possibly incorporated into mainstream thought, so we achieved that.

I put some ideas on how to encourage innovation in science and medicine into the public domain as well, and some of them have stimulated debate, if not change.

But the main achievement is to show that it is possible. Medical Hypotheses showed the way, of course, and continues to be published. But to extend that model from medicine into the life sciences, where data and observation are held in such high esteem, is an achievement. To do so under editorial choice (rather than the over-hyped Peer Review model) is even more impressive, and to do so and make the journal a scientific and economic success is a lesson I hope that others can profit from.

My thanks to the editorial board and to the authors of papers, those we could publish and those we could not. Without you it would have been a very thin journal. And to you, gentle reader my thanks as well, as you made our efforts worthwhile.

William Bains. Cambridge. October 2009.