Description

Researchers will no longer be able to comment on articles published on PubMed. The feature of PubMed Commons is about to be discontinued by the National Institutes of Health (NIH). This has left the researchers in a dilemma as they might lose a forum for open discussions on scientific articles.

Brief History of PubMed & PubMed Commons

PubMed is an online archive of more than 28 million peer-reviewed scientific articles. It is maintained by NIH and provides free access to all of the articles published on the site. Researchers could submit their papers and publish their studies on NIH's PubMed database.

For an article to be published in the database, it must be approved through a set of criteria. Researchers must submit their findings, along with all documentation of the study and funding provided. It will go through an approval process and then be published on the site. Alternatively, any study funded by NIH can also be published on the site. In 2013, in an effort to spur relevant discussions, PubMed initiated a new partner site, PubMed Commons, on a trial basis.

The PubMed Central database wanted to encourage dialogue about studies that have been posted on the site. With this focus, the idea for PubMed Commons was conceived. Comments could be posted directly to the published article. The initial trial run was supposed to be for 2 years. It was decided that after this period, NIH would review the site's performance. In 2015, NIH decided to extend the trial period further with the hope of increased participation.

Controversy in the Comment Section Leading to its End

There have been some controversies on the PubMed Commons as some published articles received comments like "factually incorrect" and "incomplete". Such derogatory comments were not considered proper on the part of the researchers. Theerfore, despite extending the original trial run, PubMed has decided to phase out PubMed Commons due to less than stellar participation. The press release from NIH explains the decision. Fewer than 6,000 articles have comments published on the site and only around 7,500 comments total. When compared to sites like PubPeer, which had over 54,000 comments in the same time frame, it's easy to see how far below expectations PubMed Commons fell.

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Did Restrictions Lead to the Downfall?

Many people in the community felt the lack of participation stemmed from PubMed database requiring commenters to use their real names. Comments could not be posted anonymously. Many scientists feared that the comments could have repercussions on the careers of their colleagues; therefore, they refrained from commenting on many articles. However, this feature of PubMed Commons was to deter destructive and uncivil behavior. It was believed that it would help initiate constructive criticism and promote dialogue amongst the people in the biomedical community.

Similar sites, such as PubPeer, allow for anonymous commenting. However, sometimes comments can become off topic and disruptive. Also, many publications such as the Public Library of Science journals allow comments to be posted directly to the article. With these factors combined, PubMed Commons was just not a viable option. As a result, NIH decided to cease operation of the PubMed Commons function.

Access to Existing Comments

New commenting has been disabled on PubMed Commons from February 15, 2018. Existing comments will remain visible on the site until March 2nd. After March 2nd, users wishing to read previous PubMed database comments will have to download the content from NIH's website. Several researchers believe that this marks the end of a forum that promoted open discussion on published research.

What is your opinion on PubMed Commons being discontinued? Please share your thoughts with us in the comments section below.

Category

1. Industry News
2. Publishing News

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