Description

The world of peer review and scientific publishing is just not ready for major changes, according to Dr. Randy Schekman, a Nobel laureate, and there are serious concerns about the science publishing model. Schekman is a well-known scientist having won a portion of the 2013 Nobel Prize for Physiology or Medicine. He would like to change the way science is published but he does not see that happening anytime soon.

Many of the higher tier publications, such as Nature or Cell and Science, will often publish work that has a certain impact factor. This impact factor is a number based upon the citations gathered by all papers published in a certain journal over a period of time. These luxury journals, as Schekman calls them, are prone to publish the flashiest work, not necessarily the best research. The incentive then for those in the science world leans toward publishing work that has a greater impact factor rather than work that really is beneficial to society and humanity.

When perceived impact is the largest criteria for the funding of research, the result is information that quite possibly is not in the best interest of the greater good and has no true benefit to society. While the luxury journals like Nature publish numerous outstanding scholarly articles, Schekman contends that they do not publish only outstanding research. Some of what appears in these journals is there for a reason— to sell subscriptions.

What eventually happens is what occurred with the research involving cloned human embryos. The subject, cloning, has a definite impact factor. It is research that not only the scientific world but also the general public is interested in. The journal *Science* retracted the information presented by a South Korean researcher due to the research being based on fabricated data. While research in cloning is desired and needed, it is imperative that such research be held to the highest of academic standards.

Schekman believes that the National Institute for Health can be of assistance. The NIH's Institute for General Medical Science, which promotes and funds basic research, accounts for just 8% of the entire budget for the NIH. If the Institute would make more money available for research (it funds 60% of Nobel Prize winners), more quality information could be made available for society.

What Schekman, and most credible scientists, long for is simply to be judged based on their contributions to their respective fields. That just is not happening currently. Unless, like Schekman, one possesses a Nobel Prize, their research is less likely to be funded because of the perceived impact. Funding sources want to see some sort of impact, again in an effort to sell subscriptions, for example.

In the world of open access scientific publishing, things need to change. No longer should research be based merely upon its flashiness or impact, but it should be based upon its contribution to society and to humanity. Changes in publishing will be slow, but ultimately will become necessary if the world is to have access to accurate, honest information.

Category

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