



JUN 14 1999

Michael I. Goldberg, Ph.D.
Executive Director
American Society for Microbiology
1325 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20005-4171

Dear Dr. Goldberg:

This is in response to your May 25 letter to Secretary Donna Shalala and the American Society for Microbiology's May 24 letter to me. Your comments on the draft proposal for E-biomed are welcome and raise interesting issues. However, perhaps due to some ambiguity in the proposal draft, your response appears to contain some misconceptions regarding E-biomed. As a prelude to the meeting we have recently scheduled with your Society's representatives, I would like to clarify and expand on some of the issues you raise and also refer you to an addendum to the May 5 draft, written in light of the discussions and correspondence to date, which will soon be posted on my Web site.

First, E-biomed will not be a Government-funded, Government-run entity. In order to fulfill its potential, E-biomed needs to be an endeavor in which the international scientific community participates, with representation of all interested parties on the Governing Board. We have been discussing a partnership with the European Molecular Biology Organization and the European Molecular Biology Laboratory, which would internationalize the project and allow technical matters to be developed jointly between the National Library of Medicine's National Center for Biotechnology Information and the European Bioinformatics Institute. We hope that organizations from other parts of the world will also become E-biomed partners.

While the National Institutes of Health (NIH) is committed to providing initial funding for E-biomed, we do not envision the NIH as the sole funding source for running E-biomed in the long term. The future funding is obviously a complex issue that requires further discussion with partner organizations, potential funding sources, and publishers in particular. Some possibilities for raising this money include contributions from partner organizations, article submission charges (with exemption policies), advertising, and donations from industrial and private sources.

We acknowledge the willingness of scientific society publishers to adapt and change to online publishing. The strides taken by editors and publishers to convert their journals into electronic format and add electronic adjuncts have been well received. But at

present, an individual or institution must either subscribe or negotiate a site license in order to access the electronic version of each journal or cluster of journals. In E-biomed, all prospective readers would be able to freely access any component of the system. This is a fundamental difference between our proposal and the practices of the current publishing system.

So that we can maintain the standards of science publishing to which we have all grown accustomed, we hope to encourage existing journals to participate in E-biomed. They would do this by contributing peer-reviewed research articles to the repository. This would create a choice of routes for depositing articles in E-biomed, as well as a filtering mechanism for readers. One route to submitting an article would be directly to the repository; this type of article would be publicly available after passing a basic screening process only. The other route would be to submit an article to a participating journal in the conventional manner. Such an article would only become available for public viewing after satisfying the criteria set out by the reviewers and editors of that journal. This may require that, in time, societies would need to invoke new financing models in order to recover their publishing costs. However, we believe that the benefits of participation--providing access to the whole breadth of the scientific literature for all--is a very strong incentive for societies to participate in E-biomed.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Harold Varmus". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Harold Varmus, M.D.
Director