

Financial and legal aspects

Subscriptions and subscription agents

Pritpal S Tamber MBChB

Editorial Director of Medicine, *BioMed Central*
www.biomedcentral.com

Director, *World Association of Medical Editors (WAME)*
www.wame.org

JPGM Gold Con: 50 years of medical writing
23-26 September 2004, Mumbai, India

Subscriptions and subscription
agents, Pritpal S Tamber, BioMed
Central

What I am going to cover



- ⌘1: What's been happening to prices
- ⌘2: Pay-per-view systems
- ⌘3: Personal v institutional subscriptions
- ⌘4: How subscription agents work

What's been happening to prices?



⌘ Increased > inflation

- ☑ More pages (linear increase)

- ☑ "Currency fluctuations"

⌘ Niche titles > general titles

⌘ General titles

- ☑ Generalist → low cost/use ratio

- ☑ Most libraries buy them

What's been happening to prices?



⌘ Niche titles

- ☑ Specialist → high cost/use ratio

- ☑ Only specialist libraries **have to** buy them

⌘ Niche titles are more inelastic (or less elastic) than general journals

⌘ Increase the price → less subscribers

⌘ **But net effect is more revenue!**

Pay-per-view systems

- ⌘ You can choose only the articles you need
- ⌘ How do you know which you need!?
- ⌘ In some cases it is **less** cost effective
- ⌘ E.g.
 - ☑ A journal costs \$30 per annum
 - ☑ It publishes 12 articles every 2 months
 - ☑ Its pay-per-view article is \$5 per article
 - ☑ What do you want for your \$30? 48 or 5?

Personal v institutional subscriptions



- ⌘ "Personals are dead"
- ⌘ ... unless society/meeting affiliated
- ⌘ Focus is on "site licenses"
- ⌘ Need to be aware of back catalogue

How subscription agents work



- ⌘ Intermediaries between libraries and publishers
- ⌘ Libraries send their wish lists (journals, books, databases) to the agents
- ⌘ The publishers send the requested products to the agents
- ⌘ The agents sorts the products and dispatches to library
- ⌘ The agents take approx 5% commission from the publisher

The pluses and minuses of subscription agents

⌘ Pluses

- ☑ Easier for libraries (one point of contact)
- ☑ Easier for publishers (ditto)

⌘ Minuses

- ☑ Ultimately libraries pay the commission
- ☑ Look out for “bundles” and “tie-ins”
- ☑ Publishers are going straight to institutions so they may disappear soon

What I have covered



- ⌘1: What's happened to prices
- ⌘2: Pay-per-view systems
- ⌘3: Personal v institutional subscriptions
- ⌘4: How subscription agents work (if they survive)

Thank you for listening

Subscriptions and subscription
agents, Pritpal S Tamber, BioMed
Central