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Editorial

The Exposome journal on hiatus: not even a flesh wound

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In a memorable scene in Monty Python's Search of the Holy Grail, King Arthur is challenged by the Black Knight. After a brief battle, King Arthur severs both of the knight's arms. The knight dismisses the damage as "merely a flesh wound" and continues fighting on. It is hard to defend the knight's detachment from reality, but one must admire his spirit. The ending of the Oxford University Press era of the Exposome journal is a slight setback, but I would argue that it isn't even a flesh wound. Many journals have gone on hiatus while new publishing agreements are established. Others have completely ceased operations because the field is undergoing a contraction. But the exposome and exposomics are not on a downward trajectory. Quite the opposite. The past year has been one of the most exciting for the field, and I AM confident that we will have a new publisher soon.

The ever-changing publishing landscape has put significant pressure on publishers. As the editor, I would have preferred to see greater visibility and more submissions. One can argue about the validity and utility of impact factors, but the vagaries of the bodies that oversee impact factors have some peculiar rules that did not work to our advantage. For example, the assessment criteria determining whether a journal can be awarded an Impact Factor limits the number of papers that include associate editors and editorial board members as co-authors. This is important to identify nefarious paper mills who are cheating the system, but inappropriate for a reputable journal that included many of the most active investigators in the growing field among their associate editors and editorial board. As our field grew, we were unable to attract a sufficient number of submissions to earn an impact factor and meet the publisher's financial targets.

The field of exposomics is witnessing exponential growth. Support from numerous funding agencies is swelling, exposome technologies are booming, and our anxiety over how to interpret the potential zettabytes of data is being allayed by the therapeutic salve of artificial intelligence. In the U.S. the National Institutes of Health is increasing their support through a variety of grant mechanisms. In the European Union there is strong support for infrastructure and research projects. In the past year there have been multiple high-profile exposome papers published in a variety of well-established journals.[1-9] The exposome has also been in the news with significant coverage from The Economist, WIRED, the Financial Times, the American Association of Medical Colleges, the Proceedings of the National Academy of Science, the Journal of the American Medical Association, Undark, and many more.

The editorial team at Exposome set a high bar on scientific quality and the papers we have published have been and will continue to be influential. Indeed, there have been many exceptional papers published in the journal,[10-13] including the 20th anniversary paper by Christopher Wild.[14] Some of these papers documented novel methods for the field[15,16] while others demonstrated the utility of existing methods to explain how exposomics can lend new insight to human health concerns.[17-19] The opening and other editorials were highly read.[20-22] The Exposome was also the outlet for several papers that resulted from the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences Catalytic Workshop Series on the Exposome.[12,13,23-26] The series was attended by over 400 people and dozens of participants helped craft several papers that appeared in the Journal.

I have drawn upon Thomas Kuhn's work The Structure of Scientific Revolutions numerous times over my career. Science does not follow a straight line. It is punctuated by disruptions and discoveries. In between, there are often periods of steady progress, which he refers to as "normal science." However, as the existing approaches to the scientific problems are challenged, these periods of normality are interrupted by what, at times, can feel like crisis or chaos. I have argued that exposomics for the past few years has been experiencing the crisis mode Kuhn described. As the field develops its scientific constructs and principles, there is considerable uncertainty and confusion. Rather than being bad, this phase portends exciting advancements as new fields find their way. Innovation do not always neatly fit into pre-existing boxes.

I AM confident that Exposome will be back with a new publishing home soon and we are actively engaged with several publishers. I want to thank Oxford University Press for taking a chance on the journal under its new open access platform and for their commitment to make sure that all of the content of the Exposome journal is available in perpetuity. I view the end of the Exposome journal era with Oxford University Press not as a flesh wound, but more like a minor bruise. To paraphrase another line from Monty Python, this time from The Meaning of Life, "I'm not dead yet … I'm getting better." The field is stronger than when we started, we weathered some major changes in the publication landscape, and have provided an outlet for dozens of high-quality manuscripts for the field. Now, we must find the most appropriate publication framework for the journal. I remain steadfast that a standalone journal is necessary for the field and

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I will continue to work to find a nurturing home to help the journal and the field flourish.

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Conflicts of interest

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