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## Correspondence

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### Ahead of print: a strategy for faster communication with readers

Recently, after finishing its peer-review process, the journal sent me a letter conveying acceptance together with an offer to publish my article 'ahead of print'. As the author of the article, I had the choice to accept the offer or to decline it. The journal's managing editor in her email clarified that because of the publishing queue, it may be a few weeks, sometimes a few months, before my contribution would be available to readers, and that to beat the queue, the journal office can process the article and publish it quickly without any proofreading or final editing. Manuscripts appearing in this 'ahead-of-print' mode will be finalized and published in the next phase of the publication operation, in which the finalized peer-reviewed article, incorporating the corrections by the journal's editors and those made by the author during proofreading, will be replaced with the ahead-of-print version, without the corrections. However, authors or the editors may suggest additional, usually minor, corrections, modifications, or improvements for the final print version, and these will be incorporated before final print publication.

I write this letter to discuss the strategy of this ahead-of-print mode, also referred to by some journals as 'online-first' or 'coming issue'. Articles published ahead of print may contain minor errors of formatting, grammar and spelling, interpretation, or graphical presentation. Such articles, with the minor errors, are available to readers. However, the editors, the authors, or the journal are not responsible or liable in any way for any misunderstanding because of the errors including inaccurate or misleading data or information contained in the ahead-of-print articles.

Although errors in ahead-of-print articles have the potential to mislead their readers, such a mode offers an effective strategy for motivating authors. A likely positive effect is reduction in publication delay, as the delay has negative effects on the authors' motivation to write. Publication delay has been listed as one of the challenging problems in science publishing. Delay-free publication, through the ahead-of-print mode, would increase the chances of the contribution thus published of being cited. Nowadays, journals and scholars mostly focus on the

number of citations;<sup>1</sup> and ahead of print is a worthy strategy to provide a competitive advantage. These ahead-of-print online articles can be cited simply by using the date of access and/or the DOI.

Moreover, the strategy also speeds up communication between scholars, authors, and readers through prompt availability of articles to readers. In some fast-growing fields, it is essential to share the new findings with researchers and other scientists as quickly as possible. Delays in publishing new findings in medicine and health-related fields are unethical: faster communication between scholars can contribute to faster development of the sciences and technologies. The ahead-of-print strategy has the ability to speed up publication by simplifying the process. For instance, one of the author's articles, Author's index,<sup>2</sup> was accepted for publication in the winter issue (December 2017) of a journal, but the ahead-of-print version was online as early as 26 July 2017. Only a few days later, the author received another ahead-of-print article<sup>3</sup> from a different journal in which another author had suggested some improvements in the Author's index proposed in the article by the present author even before its official publication. Therefore, I advise open-access journals, especially in the faster growing fields, to benefit from the ahead-of-print strategy to boost the speed of research and development

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