Exploring perceptions and attitudes toward Open Access among medical researchers at the University of Ljubljana

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INTRODUCTION AND AIMS

Open Access (OA) policies are in the process of being established in Slovenia at the national and university level. An important milestone was reached in September 2015 by adopting the National Strategy for Open Access to Scientific Publications and Research Data in Slovenia 2015-2020 (1). Furthermore, the Slovenian Research Agency introduced its policy on OA in 2016. The necessary infrastructure to support and sustain OA publishing is currently under development (2).

Advocating OA has become one of the crucial goals at the Central Medical Library (CML) of the Faculty of Medicine, University of Ljubljana (FM UL). The CML has recently created an OA guide using Libguides (Fig. 1) in order to contribute to this objective.

The aim of this study was to explore perceptions and attitudes toward OA among medical researchers affiliated with the FM UL, to identify their needs regarding information on OA and assess the usability of the OA guide.

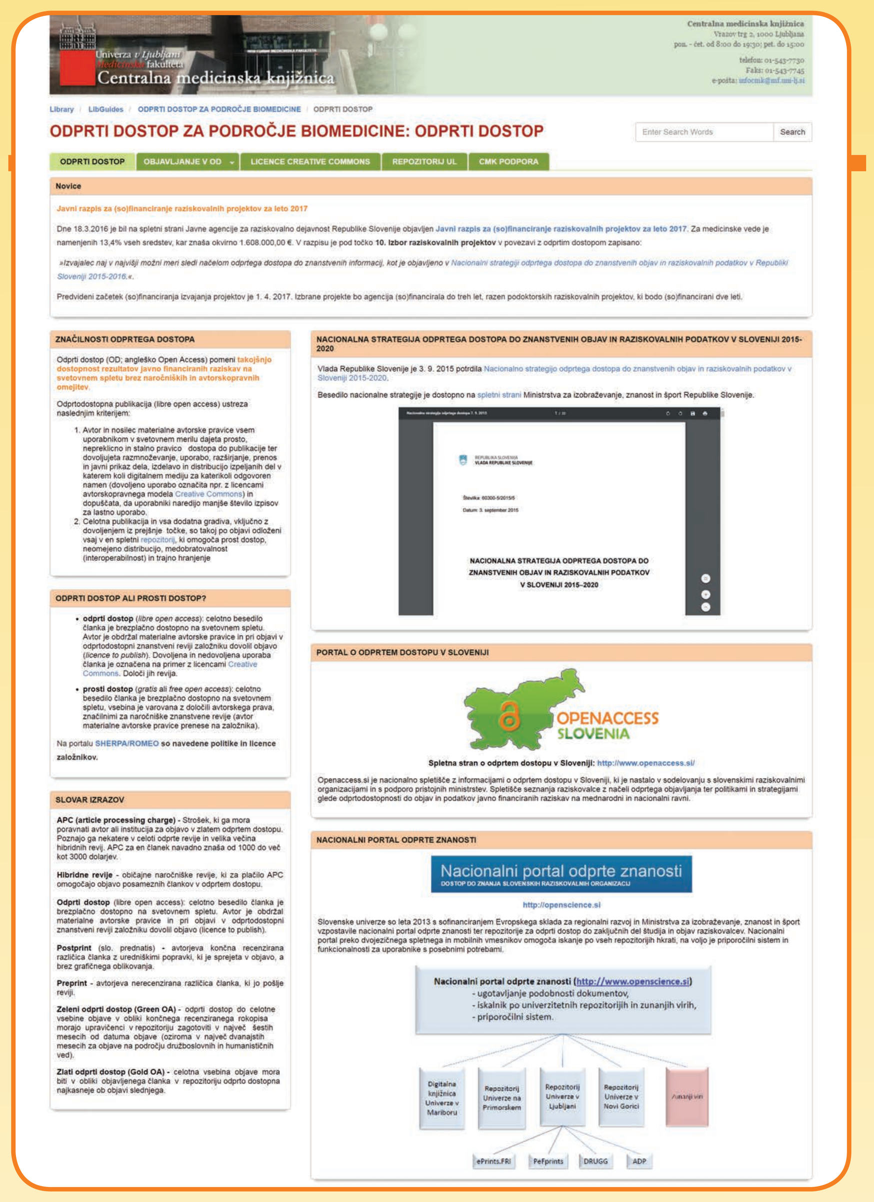

Figure 1: CML's Open Access guide, created in Libguides environment (http://uni-lj.beta.libguides.com/oa_biomedicina).

METHODS

- A survey was conducted among medical researchers at the FM UL between January 13-23, 2016.
- A link to an anonymous online questionnaire was sent to 300 researchers.
- The survey questions were organized into different sections referring to the participants' familiarity and attitude towards OA, their publishing practices, their understanding of predatory publishers/journals and finally the researchers' expectations about the CML's support on OA.

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RESULTS

A total of 20 (7%) respondents completed the survey.

Familiarity with OA

- Researchers' familiarity with OA in general is fair, however they are less acquainted with the National Strategy for OA, the University of Ljubljana's institutional repository and Horizon 2020 Open Access requirements (Fig. 2).
- Most respondents know at least one OA journal.
- Researchers regularly use OA articles for research or educational purposes.

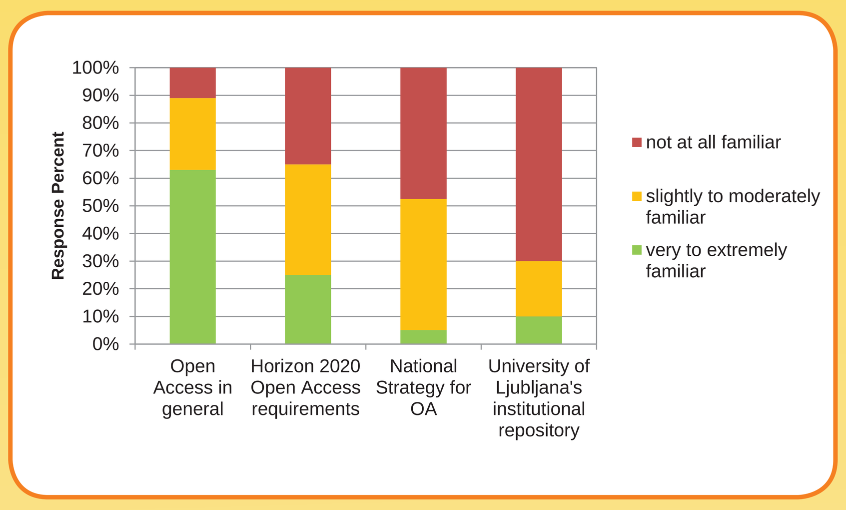

Figure 2: Researchers' familiarity with OA.

Attitude towards OA

- Respondents think that the most important advantages of OA are increased readership, more citations and greater visibility of their publications, while the most important disadvantages are publication charges (Fig. 3).

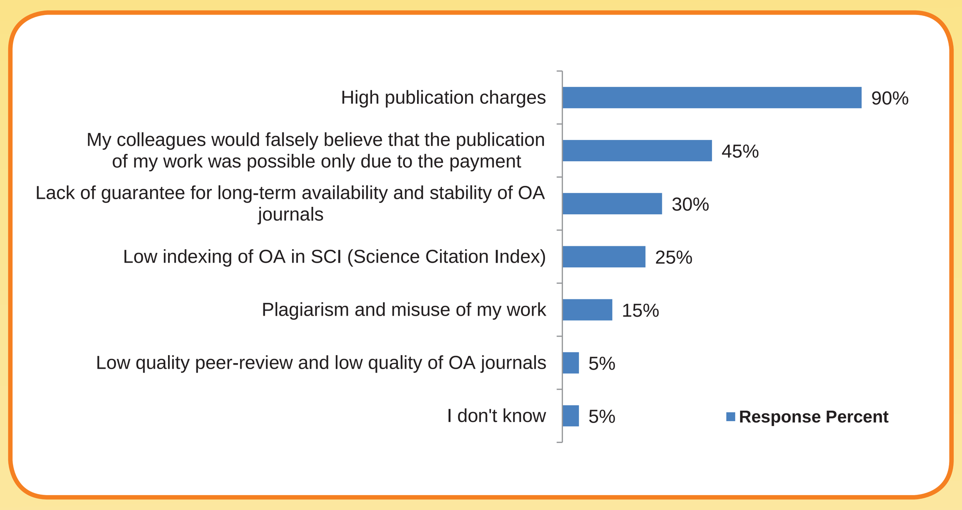

Figure 3: Researchers' opinions on obstacles regarding publishing in OA.

Publishing practices

- Journal impact factor is considered to be the most important criterion in selecting a journal for publication.
- The majority of the participants have published between 0 and 3 OA articles in the last five years.
- Most respondents' research funders have not imposed any requirements in regard to OA publishing.
- The main reasons that would encourage researchers to publish in OA are increased readership and more citations (Fig. 4).

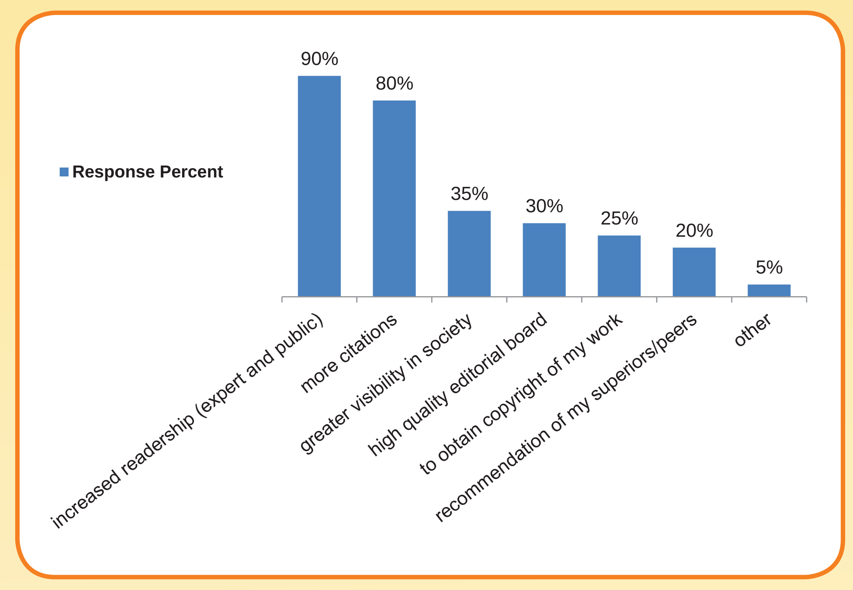

Figure 4: Main reasons that would encourage researchers to publish in OA.

Predatory publishers/journals

- Researchers are slightly to fairly familiar with predatory publishers/journals and misleading metrics.
- Respondents regularly receive e-mail invitations from predatory publishers/journals to contribute an article or book chapter for publication, but they all ignore this kind of invitations.

CML's support on OA

- Respondents expect various forms of support regarding many different aspects of OA from the CML (Fig. 5).
- Researchers think the CML's OA guide is partially appropriate in terms of its extent, usability and the organization of information.

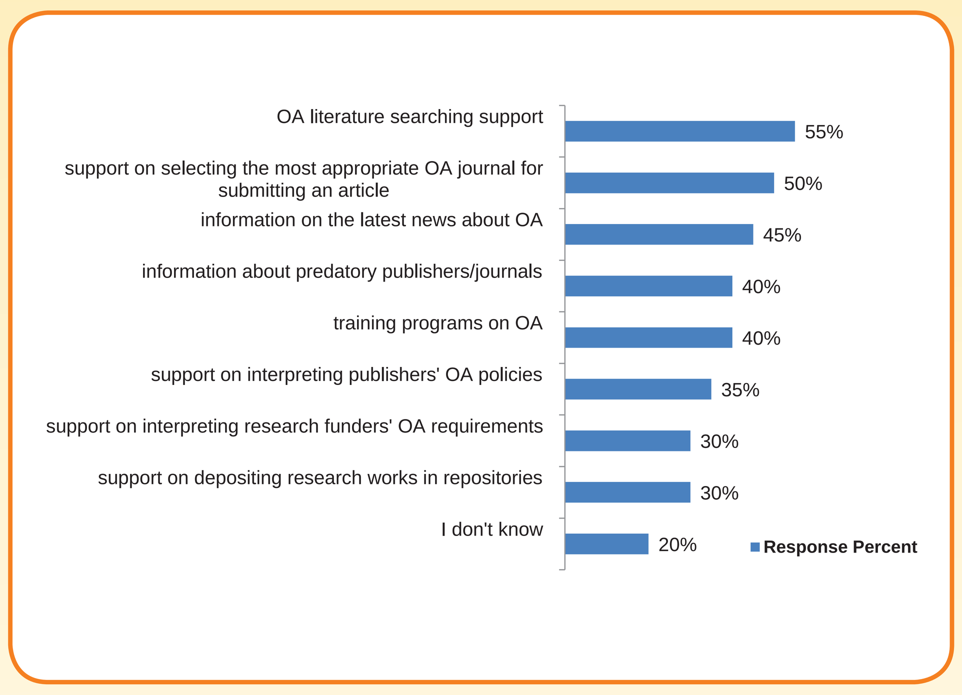

Figure 5: Researchers' expectations about the CML's support on OA.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

- Due to low response rate and small sample size, the results bring limited information on researchers' current level of awareness and knowledge about OA including their experience with OA publishing.
- The results indicate that OA publishing is currently in the process of establishing itself among medical researchers at the FM UL. Researchers' knowledge on OA publishing issues corresponds with the development of OA in Slovenia.
- Medical researchers need effective information support about OA issues from the CML. The CML has to improve the LibGuides guide and enhance its promotion and supporting activities for OA.
- This is the first survey exploring the views of Slovenian academic medical researchers on OA. In recent years, several similar studies were conducted throughout Europe (3-6). Our findings roughly correspond with those of previously published data. Further studies on this subject should be done when OA policies are established at the national level.