



VETERINARY  
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## Letter from the editor

**Richard Evans**

Editor-in-chief, *Veterinary Evidence*

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*Veterinary Evidence* doesn't have an official soundtrack, but if it did, it would be Saul Williams' 2007 release *The Inevitable Rise and Liberation*. It's not the lyrics that make the album a good match with *VE*, it's how Williams crushed the music-publishing industry status quo by giving the album away for free and charging \$5 for a higher-quality version. Five times as many people downloaded *The Inevitable Rise* as downloaded Williams' previous album. He tapped a much larger audience for his future albums. He spread his word.

Veterinary and academic publishing mirror the music business. A few big academic publishers (like Reed Elsevier, Springer and Wiley) control about half of the published scientific content. In a 2005 report about academic publishing, Deutsche Bank stated:

*We believe the publisher adds relatively little value to the publishing process. We are not attempting to dismiss what 7,000 people at [Reed Elsevier] do for a living. We are simply observing that if the process really were as complex, costly and value-added as the publishers protest that it is, 40% margins wouldn't be available.*

It all started in the 1960s, when academic journals, the precursor of today's multi-functional websites, were run by learned societies. The journals almost always lost money for the societies, so the societies were perfectly happy to sell their journals to publishing houses, who in turn raised the subscription rates to libraries. The publishing houses also got free editing and reviewing labor on the backs of scholars, so it's no wonder they make 40% margins.

It wasn't always that way. Henry Oldenburg, the first editor of *The Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London*, established in 1662 (and still going), viewed *Phil. Trans.* as a public exchange of letters and a way to establish scientific provenance. He is also credited with inventing peer review as a way to weed the lush garden of 1600's science. Peer review has always had mixed success - for example, *Phil. Trans.* rejected smallpox pioneer Edward Jenner's 1797 paper on using cowpox as a smallpox vaccine., the scientific publishing equivalent of turning down Harry Potter or the Beatles.

In his introduction to the first issue of *Phil. Trans.*, Oldenburg wrote about the importance of disseminating information:

*Whereas there is nothing more necessary for promoting the improvement of Philosophical Matters, than the communicating to such, as apply their Studies and Endeavors that way, such things as are discovered or put in practice by others; it is therefore thought fit to employ the Press, as the most proper way to gratify those, whose engagement in such Studies, and delight in the advancement of Learning and profitable Discoveries, doth entitle them to the knowledge of what this Kingdom, or other parts of the World, do, from time to time, afford ..."*

So it's time to probe that entitlement, and to "delight in the advancement of Learning." From Henry Oldenburg to Saul Williams, *Veterinary Evidence* is committed to breaking the mold of veterinary publishing, and to using the best new ideas on disseminating high quality, practitioner-relevant, information: open access, open commentary, open peer review, speedy turnaround times, prizes for collections of Knowledge Summaries and the list goes on. Welcome to *Veterinary Evidence*.

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