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A Story to Tell

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EDITORIAL

A Story to Tell

Telling stories is not a strong suit of mine. I often find myself blurting out the ending in a scramble to recapture my waning audience.

It's too bad, really, because storytelling doesn't just come in handy around a campfire. It plays a significant role with memory and information recall and that is why some of the most compelling, dramatic and unforgettable rhetoric appears in the form of a story.

With Open Access (OA) Week approaching in October, I thought I'd share the following true story.

Earlier this year, my close friend (a practicing physician) asked for help deciphering the copyright issues associated with reproducing an operating room "check-list" document that he planned to distribute to his colleagues in medicine.

This safety checklist, developed by Harvard Medical School professor and surgeon Dr. Atul Gawande[1] and his colleagues, improved patient care during critical moments in the operating room. Implementing this checklist in hospitals could be the difference between life and death. It had the potential to save thousands of lives. Sharing this tool was a no-brainer.

Because of his advocacy and interest in patient safety, my physician friend had attracted the attention from one of the nation's leading hospital networks. The corporate office wanted to distribute these checklists to over 16,000 physicians in 130 hospitals located in 30 states. With vast resources and boundless support pledged by the corporate office, what could possibly go wrong?

As we learned, the operating room checklist was published in an academic journal and the authors would not provide permission to use the materials because they *could not*. They had signed over their copyrights to a publisher. The publisher's permission was necessary to get this checklist out of the academic journals and into the hands of health professionals. As my friend put it, "I needed the key to unlock the shackles placed on this checklist."

It became his personal mission to secure permissions from the publisher in order to nationally distribute this life-saving tool.

He first used the web-based permissions form from the main publisher website. Weeks passed and no answer. After some digging, he found the publishers' Chicago office information and emailed them. Another couple months passed. He located the Chicago office phone number, and after a few tries, found the right person to talk to. More weeks passed. While the publisher's Chicago office sent multiple requests to the main New York office on this physician's behalf, nothing happened. Finally, my friend asked for the direct line to the head honcho.

After two rings, the New York executive answered. He was aware of the request and granted permissions to my friend. A follow-up email confirmed this in writing.

While elated at the news, he couldn't help but share his frustration with the experience. "It is such a byzantine process. Just think of the patient lives that could have potentially been saved during those months of waiting for permissions. *Why* did the authors give away their rights to the publisher?"

Why, indeed.

As OA advocates, it is our duty to make the "*why*" of open access more compelling to the everyman. Instead of reciting the dysfunction of the traditional scholarly communication system, think about how OA issues, such as author rights, can be made personal, relatable and universal. Tell the important OA stories about and for

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everyday people. Why? Because the ripples of these issues often reach beyond the shores of the ivory tower. You never know where you might discover a new OA advocate —they often come from unexpected places.

As the 6th annual Open Access Week[2] approaches, think about how you can tell your story so others understand "why OA?".

I will be working on my story. That is, even if I do blurt out the ending.

A Dedication

This issue is dedicated to J.Q. Johnson (University of Oregon), a founding JLSC Editorial Board Member. He will be missed.

Marisa Ramírez
Co-Editor

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IN-TEXT LINKS

[1] http://gawande.com/
[2] http://www.openaccessweek.org/