

The Diamond road to Open Science

Patrick Furrer^{1,2}, Carlos Quinto^{1,3,4,5}

1 Co-President, SMW supporting association; 2 Head, University Hospital Medical Library (BiUM), Lausanne University Hospital (CHUV) and University of Lausanne (UNIL), Lausanne; 3 Member of the Swiss Medical Association (FMH) Central Board, Berne, Switzerland; 4 Swiss Tropical and Public Health Institute (Swiss TPH), Allschwil, Switzerland; 5 Institute of Family Medicine, University of Basel, Basel, Switzerland

Summary

Diamond Open Access is the fairest and most sustainable model for scientific communication. The Diamond model promotes editorial independence, supports researchers by waiving article processing charges, and serves as an indispensable public research infrastructure. "Read & Publish" agreements increase dependence on large commercial publishers, and some of the funds currently spent on such agreements could instead be used to provide long-term support for Diamond journals. Promising models for sustainable funding and collaboration are emerging through national and international initiatives. However, Switzerland is already providing concrete evidence that institutions do not have to wait until national mechanisms are fully developed. In 2025, the University of Lausanne launched the "Diamond Open Access Fund", a pioneering initiative of its kind in Switzerland.

The future development of Diamond Open Access should focus not only on sustainable funding but also on enhancing the quality, transparency, and culture of scholarly publishing. As Switzerland's only fully peer-reviewed English-language Diamond medical journal, the Swiss Medical Weekly (SMW) provides an essential platform for clinically relevant Swiss research, offering international visibility and immediate open access without author fees or embargoes. SMW will continue to work towards modernising its quality assurance processes and contributing to international developments in the field of Open Science, with a view to strengthening transparency, reproducibility, and relevance in medical research.

It is a privilege for us to address the Swiss Medical Weekly (SMW) community as we take up the role of co-presidents of the SMW supporting association. SMW has appeared continuously since 1871 and was among the very first journals to embrace Diamond Open Access, having made all articles freely accessible without requiring authors to pay article processing charges (APC) even before the publication of the Berlin Declaration on Open Access. The journal is free to read and free to publish, with editorial independence now guaranteed by the SMW supporting association and publishing costs met collectively rather than charged to authors.

The FMH supports the SMW because the journal plays an important role in fostering the next generation of medical professionals in Switzerland, particularly with regard to scientific training and development. Furthermore, from the FMH's perspective, the Diamond Open Access model represents a forward-looking concept that strikes a balance between independence and collaboration. Diamond Open Access (also known as Platinum Open Access) is a publishing model in which scientific literature is made immediately and freely accessible to readers, charging authors absolutely no APCs. This model, once dismissed as idealistic, is now widely recognised as the most equitable and durable foundation for scholarly communication. The question we must face is no longer whether Diamond is desirable but how we finance it, govern it, and continuously improve it at scale. This could be particularly relevant for increasing the share of the Diamond model relative to more profit-oriented models, such as the "big deals", "Read & Publish" agreements, and the Gold OA model (based on APCs).

Much of the money in academic publishing still flows through so-called Read & Publish or "transformative" agreements. Conceived as a bridge away from subscriptions, these deals have too often become a destination. They commit institutions to multi-year contracts with a small num-

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Patrick Furrer, PhD

University Hospital Medical Library
(BiUM)

Bugnon 46
CH-1011 Lausanne
[patrick.furrer\[at\]chuv.ch](mailto:patrick.furrer[at]chuv.ch)

ber of dominant commercial publishers, shift reading budgets into publishing budgets without lowering overall expenditure, and channel public funds into article processing charges. The “transformative” label promised a transition; a decade on, the dependency it was meant to dissolve has, in several respects, deepened. As library systems in the United Kingdom and the University of California, as well as participants in the German DEAL negotiations, reassess or step away from such contracts, Switzerland has both the opportunity and the responsibility to ask a harder question: are we paying to transform the system, or paying to preserve it?

The revised Swiss National Open Access Strategy, adopted in 2024 by swissuniversities and the Swiss National Science Foundation, provides a clear answer. It commits the country to a fully open publishing landscape by 2032 and identifies the scaling-up of Diamond capacity as essential to reducing dependence on oligopolistic markets [1]. Crucially, it frames Diamond not as charity but as infrastructure: a public good deserving coordinated, long-term funding in the same way as libraries, repositories, and research data services.

This is where the most consequential work of the coming years lies and where innovative funding models matter most. The national CoDOA initiative, led by the Consortium of Swiss Academic Libraries and bringing together a dozen Swiss institutions under the swissuniversities Open Science programme, is building precisely such a mechanism: a consortial model in which institutions contribute collectively to sustain Diamond journals while these journals retain full editorial and organisational independence [2]. CoDOA embodies a philosophy that its proponents call “scaling small”. Rather than concentrating publishing in ever-larger commercial platforms, it networks many independent, scholar-led venues through shared governance and pooled support. For a journal such as SMW, this is the difference between surviving on goodwill and being recognised as critical national research infrastructure.

Switzerland already provides a concrete demonstration that institutions need not wait for national mechanisms to mature. In early 2025, the University of Lausanne, together with the Cantonal and University Library of Lausanne (BCUL) and the Lausanne University Hospital Library (BiUM), launched a dedicated Diamond Open Access Fund, a pioneering initiative of its kind in Switzerland, with funding of CHF 150,000 per year for the 2025–2027 period [3]. It is exactly this kind of earmarked, recurrent institutional commitment, modest in absolute terms yet powerful in signal, that turns the principle of scholar-owned publishing into a concrete line in the budget. Were every Swiss university to follow Lausanne’s lead, the cumulative effect would rival, at a fraction of the cost, the sums currently absorbed by transformative agreements.

The strategic case is compelling. A fraction of the funds currently committed to transformative agreements would, if redirected, place Diamond publishing in Switzerland on a stable footing for a generation. Therefore, easing journals’ transition to Diamond depends less on persuading editors of its merits and more on giving institutions the financial instruments and the collective confidence to act. SMW intends to be a constructive partner in that transition and, where useful, a practical demonstration of what a mature Diamond journal can be. SMW also collaborates with several other Swiss Diamond journals, having initiated Diamond+, the Association of Swiss Diamond Open Access Journals [4].

No national system can thrive in isolation. The “German Servicestelle Diamond Open Access” (SeDOA), launched in 2025 with funding from the “Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft” and coordinated by a consortium of fifteen institutions, is establishing a shared service centre, a registry, and an innovation lab for scholar-led publishing and connecting them to the “European Diamond Capacity Hub” and the DIAMAS (Developing Institutional Open Access Publishing Models to Advance Scholarly Communication) network [5, 6]. That SMW’s managing director, Dr Natalie Marty, serves on SeDOA’s International Advisory Board is more than a courtesy: it places our journal at the centre of the cross-border conversation on common standards, shared services, and sustainable funding, and it ensures that lessons learned in one national context flow rapidly into others. We will continue to build these bridges because the alternative to a commercial monoculture is not a patchwork of isolated journals but a deliberately interconnected commons.

That European conversation is also about to acquire a legislative dimension that Switzerland cannot afford to read as a purely foreign affair. The European Research Area (ERA) Act, on which the European Commission is expected to bring forward a proposal in the second half of 2026, will further mainstream Open Science and secure the free circulation of scientific knowledge across the continent [9]. Among the measures most consistently pressed by the research community are an immediate open access requirement for publicly funded results, firm protection against restrictive contractual practices, and a generalised rights retention strategy that would allow authors to

deposit their accepted manuscripts into open repositories without embargo, regardless of the publisher's policy. Switzerland should adapt its legal framework and mark a clear shift away from author charges and transformative deals and towards scholar-owned, rights-retaining publishing. For a Diamond journal such as SMW, the ERA Act is less a constraint than a tailwind.

As stated by UNESCO, *"The Diamond Open Access model embodies the principles outlined in the UNESCO Recommendation on Open Science, advocating for the unrestricted accessibility of scientific research as part of a broader commitment to equity, inclusivity, and collective benefit. By positioning science as a global public good, UNESCO emphasises the need to eliminate barriers that hinder knowledge sharing and scientific progress"* [10].

As we strengthen the foundations of Diamond publishing, we should be equally ambitious about its quality and its culture, and here, the future of peer review deserves our attention. SMW, like most medical journals, has long relied on single-blind review. However, the values that animate Diamond open access, such as transparency, accountability, and the recognition of scholarly contribution, point naturally towards more open forms of evaluation. Open peer review is not a single practice but a spectrum: open identities, open reports published alongside the article, and open participation by the wider community [7]. The available evidence suggests that, when applied thoughtfully, these approaches can improve the constructiveness of reviews, deter misconduct, and give reviewers the visible credit their labour deserves, without compromising rigour. In close collaboration with our Editorial Board, we intend to explore how SMW might experiment with some elements of open review so that the integrity of our reviewing is further improved and made more transparent and that the engagement and dedication of our editors and reviewers are recognised. A scholar-led journal should have nothing to hide and much to show. In this context, we also take part in Open Journal Systems (OJS) working groups and conferences and exchange ideas with other journals that use OJS. Further developments to OJS will, for example, be made available to all OJS users through its collaboration with Open Research Europe (<https://open-research-europe.ec.europa.eu/>), Diamond's flagship publication platform, which is co-funded by the European Commission and several research funding bodies, such as the Swiss National Science Foundation.

The coming years will decide whether open access fulfils its original promise of a research literature owned by and accountable to the scholarly community, or whether it settles into a marketplace that is more open yet no less concentrated [8]. This opening will contribute to the improvement of the quality, transparency, reproducibility, and relevance of the evidence-based medical information provided by SMW. Swiss Medical Weekly has spent over 25 years showing that such a reliable and responsible path is possible. With a supportive national strategy, maturing funding instruments such as CoDOA (Creating a Sustainable Funding Scheme for Diamond Open Access through Institutional Collaboration in Switzerland), strong European partners, and a readiness to modernise how we assure quality, we have a rare chance to turn these principles into durable practice and to further develop the Diamond model for medical literature worldwide.

For Swiss clinicians and scientists, having a dedicated national reference journal matters in ways that international titles cannot fully replicate. SMW publishes research grounded in the Swiss healthcare system, addressing the epidemiological, regulatory, and institutional realities that shape clinical practice in this country, from the specificities of cantonal health policy to the disease patterns of Alpine and peri-urban populations. This territory is largely overlooked by the major commercial medical journals, whose scope and editorial priorities are inevitably shaped by their global subscriber base rather than by the needs of a small, multilingual, high-income country. SMW occupies a distinct position. It is the only fully peer-reviewed English-language Swiss Diamond journal dedicated to the publication of clinical medical research and case reports, indexed in the major international databases and committed to the highest standards of evidence-based reporting. A clinician in Zurich or a researcher in Geneva who wishes to publish findings that are both internationally visible and immediately accessible to Swiss colleagues – without author charges and without embargo – has, in SMW, a venue that no commercial competitor can match on those combined terms.

We warmly invite our institutions, funders, editors, reviewers, and readers to seize this opportunity to support the Diamond model with us. The transformation worth pursuing is not the one from subscriptions to author charges, but the one towards a publishing system that the clinicians, the academic community, and our readers genuinely own and share.

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