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Editorial

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There is some debate as to whether 2000 or 2001 was the 'year of the genome'. In either case, in its one-and-a-half year history *Genome **Biology*** has witnessed the publication of the first plant genome, the first draft of the human genome (twice) and a more than doubling of the number of completed microbial sequences. There has also been a welcome shift away from viewing 'functional genomics' as another name for microarray data and towards embracing studies of the expression, structure and function of proteins, implementing pathway and network analysis, and harnessing the power of comparative genomics. This journal has aimed to report on and encourage debate about these trends and will continue to do so.

In addition to a varied diet of news, commentary, reviews and analysis, *Genome **Biology*** has also published nearly a hundred original research articles so far, with the vast majority being published after peer review [<http://genomebiology.com/refres/start.asp>] and a small number being made available as 'preprints', without peer review [<http://genomebiology.com/preprint/start.asp>]. All research articles have been made freely available to all readers over the web immediately on publication, and peer-reviewed research has been deposited in PubMed Central, in keeping with the policies of free access to original research subscribed to by this journal and our publisher BioMed Central. In this regard, *Genome **Biology*** is one of the few journals to meet in full the demands made by the nearly 29,000 signatories of the Public Library of Science Open Letter (see <http://www.publiclibraryofscience.org/>): "[to provide] unrestricted free distribution rights to any and all original research reports ... through PubMed Central and similar online public resources, within 6 months of their initial publication date".

As debate has raged over the past year on the importance and merits of providing immediate world-wide, barrier-free open access to the full text of research articles (see, for example, <http://www.nature.com/nature/debates/e-access/>), BioMed Central has become persuaded that the most sustainable and fair method for ensuring that the costs of peer-review and publication are met while allowing full and unfettered access to research articles is to levy a relatively small article-processing charge on the authors of each published article (provided that they can afford to pay). From 2002, therefore, journals published by BioMed Central will implement a charge of US \$500 for each original research manuscript that is accepted for publication. Charges will be waived for authors who are genuinely unable to pay - for example, authors from lower- and lower-middle-income countries, as defined by the World Bank [<http://www.worldbank.org/>]. If free access to articles is in this way ensured 'up front', we estimate that the true cost to the scientific community per published article will be about one-tenth of the current cost under a traditional journal subscription-based model, and we are therefore encouraging institutions to subscribe to this model (see <http://www.biomedcentral.com/info/instmembership.asp>). *Genome **Biology*** will not begin to levy article-processing charges until later in 2002, but we are taking this opportunity to alert readers and potential authors to our plans.

Other plans for 2002 include improvements to our online technologies to expedite manuscript submission and peer review, as well as ongoing development of our facilities for identifying, commenting on and archiving articles of interest to each reader on a personalized basis. We also hope to continue to develop facilities for publishing software and algorithms (see <http://genomebiology.com/software/start.asp>), as well as building on our strengths in reviews and commentaries. The precise form these will take depends on work in the scientific community. We look forward to both the long-promised additional mammalian, plant, fungal and microbial genome sequences and the less foreseeable surprises in technology and its applications that will occupy us in 2002. As ever, we depend on your support and input to ensure the journal meets your needs.

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