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Comparison of BioMed Central APCs from 2010-2016

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Posted by [Sara Wheatley](#)

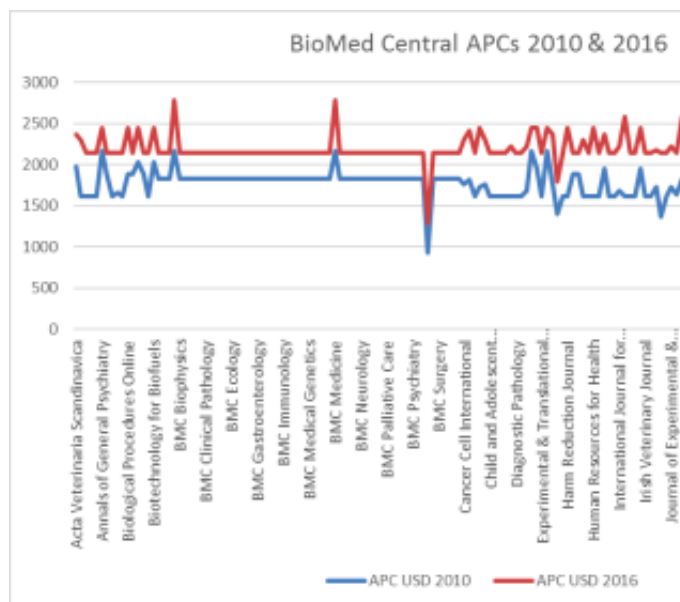
Method

We compared 2016 BioMed Central (BMC) Article Processing Charges (APCs) in US dollars (USD) with APC data from 2010, 2013, 2014 and 2015. A total of 165 matching journal titles were compared.

2010/2016

All but one title has increased its APCs since 2010. *Molecular Autism* was the only title that decreased. Its APCs were \$2200 in 2010 and are now \$2145, with a decrease of -3%. 18% was the mode of the percentage of increase since 2010, with 55/165 titles increasing their APCs by 18%, all of these APCs were \$1825 and are now \$2145. The highest percentage of change (77%) was for the journal, *Orphanet Journal of Rare Diseases*, which was charging \$1365 in 2010 and is now charging \$2410 in 2016. The average price in 2010 was about \$1750 while the average price in 2016 is \$2197. The chart below shows a comparison of a sample of BMC journal titles with APCs from 2010 and 2016.

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2013/2016

Most APCs have increased since 2013 as well. 163/165 increased and two have decreased. The mode of percentage of change from 2013 to 2016 was 4%, 80/165 titles increased by 4%. Another prevalent percentage was 21%. 42 titles increased by 21%, 40/42 of these titles were priced at \$1780 in 2013 and increased to \$2145 in 2016. Finally, two titles, *Molecular Autism* and *Neural Development*, have decreased in price since 2013, both were priced at \$2355, but have since reduced in price by \$210. The highest percentage of change, 36%, was the *Journal of Cardiovascular Magnetic Resonance*, which was \$1580 in 2013 and is now \$2145. The average price in 2013 was \$1984, compared to \$2197 in 2016.

2014/2016

Interestingly, many APCs increased between 2013 and 2014, but decreased in 2015. APCs of 94 journal titles have decreased since 2014, and two have stayed the same. -3% was the mode of percentage of change for 76 titles, all but one of these was priced at \$2215 in 2014, and they are now \$2145 in 2016. The highest percentage of change, 17%, was the *Health Research Policy and Systems*, which was \$1960 in 2010 and \$2300 in 2016. The lowest percentage of decrease was a tie between *Molecular Autism* and *Neural Development* at -16%, both were \$2545 in 2014 and are now \$2145. The average charges were \$2168 in 2014, which is slightly lower than the \$2197 average in 2016.

2015/2016

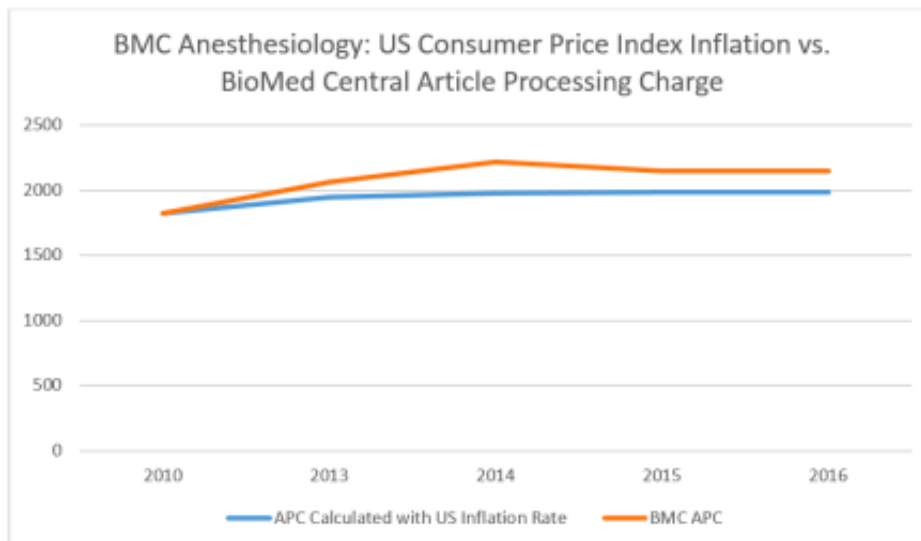
Most, 111/165 (67%), titles' APCs have stayed the same since 2015. *Molecular Autism* and *Neural Development* are the only two titles that have decreased their APCs, from \$2450 to \$2145. The average APC price has increased from \$2149 to \$2197. The highest percentage of increase was a tie between 21 journals at 11%, all of these titles were charging \$1940 in 2015 and are now charging \$2145.

US Inflation Rates Compared to BMC APCs

When comparing the percentage change of BMC APCs from 2010 to 2016, it is clear that most prices have increased at a higher rate than the US rate of inflation. The United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, lists the average Consumer Price Index (CPI) or US inflation rates for each year from 2010 to 2015 as: 2010: 1.6%, 2011: 3.2%, 2012: 2.1%, 2013: 1.5%, 2014: 1.6%, 2015: 0.1% (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016). When compounded, the US inflation rate from 2010 to 2016 comes to 8.7%. However, when comparing BMC's APCs, most titles (148/165) have increased by 18% or more since 2010.

In 2010, \$1825 was the most prevalent APC amount listed by BMC. According to the CPI Inflation Calculator provided by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, that price in 2016 would be \$1,984.48. However, BMC lists all APCs that were formerly \$1825, for example *BMC Anesthesiology*, in 2010 as \$2145 in 2016. The chart below compares the price of *BMC Anesthesiology* using the US inflation rate against the BMC APC. As you can see, in 2014 the APC, like many APCs, increased (from \$2060 in 2013 to \$2215 in 2014), but decreased to \$2145 in 2015 and has remained at this price as of April 13, 2016.

Our comparison of inflation rates to APCs harkens back to the *Report on the Association of Research Libraries (ARL) Serials Project* by Ann Okerson (1989). The objective of Okerson's study was to test the hypothesis that subscription prices had risen at a faster rate than inflation in publishing costs, which was found to be true (1989). In our case, a majority of APCs have stayed the same since 2015, but most APCs have increased at a higher rate than the rate of inflation when comparing 2010 to 2016 charges. These mixed results suggest that BMC's APCs could be increasing over time at a faster rate than the rate of inflation, however it is too soon to say what the future will hold. We will continue to monitor BMC's APCs in order to gain insight into future pricing trends.



References

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3 THOUGHTS ON "COMPARISON OF BIOMED CENTRAL APCs FROM 2010-2016"



Panagrellus

— APRIL 15, 2016 AT 8:40 AM

Just a minor point, but since BMC is based in the UK, shouldnT you compare APCs to UK (not US) inflation rates – If the aim was to " test

the hypothesis that subscription prices had risen at a faster rate than inflation in publishing costs". Inflation in the UK was slightly higher than in the US during most years recently. (Not sure whether it would really make a significant difference to your analysis though).

Reply



Sara Wheatley

— APRIL 15, 2016 AT 12:12 PM

Good point, but our data from previous years was only in USD. Since they provide fees in 3 currencies we wouldn't be able to convert it accurately if we compared it to UK inflation.

Reply

hgmorrison

— APRIL 15, 2016 AT 1:56 PM

Thanks, Panagrellus. This is a good point.

One of the other trends that we are looking at is the impact of currency fluctuations for authors and funders in different areas. This is not a new issue. Any time we purchase goods or services, whether APCs or subscriptions, in a currency other than our own, our purchasing ability is impacted by changes in exchange rates. For example, Jihane and I wrote a post explaining how PLOS ONE's good model of retaining a flat price over many years in USD could in effect be a 6% – 77% price increase over 3 years if your local currency is not USD. Differences in inflation rates between countries would have a similar impact.

One way to avoid or minimize the impact of currency fluctuations and other economic differences between one country and another is to support models where most or all of the cost is local – local currencies, at local salary rates. Supporting local publishing (e.g. library support for the journals faculty members at their university are involved in) is one example of this kind of model. Local publishing does not necessarily mean that content must be restricted in scope to local matters; these journals are often international in scope.

Another mixed model we see journals experimenting with involves options for language editing when this is needed. This makes sense to me. For example, why should authors from the developing world pay for copyediting services in the developed world where prices reflect a higher standard and cost of living, when it is quite likely that they could have high quality copyediting services at much lower local rates, either in their own country or another developing country?

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