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I thought it important that I, as a medical librarian in a community hospital, voice my opinion on the possibility of the guidelines to the U.S. Copyright Act being revised.

I understand that there is an emerging market in article-purchasing online from journal publishers. However, in the case of libraries who are providing articles to hospital staff and physicians which are related to patient care, requiring libraries to find articles for which we must pay a price before we are allowed to send articles to our patrons will increase our ILL costs significantly and it will add a layer of bureaucracy that is burdensome in the context of patient care.

Librarians are extremely cognizant of and careful about abiding by the provisions of the Copyright Act. My library religiously pays attention to the 5 articles in one year from the last 5 years. We do not save any articles on our hard drive which we have sent to patrons. The National Library of Medicine's Docline borrowing/lending system has guidelines which ask all libraries to borrow regionally before borrowing nationally or internationally. Our "routing table," which each medical library creates, sends requests for articles locally first, then regionally, then nationally. This is a matter of courtesy rather than expediency; a library in Missouri, which has enough to do serving its own patrons, is going to be extremely reluctant to provide my library routine articles, when I am able to get the same in the Pacific Northwest region. In the same vein, libraries have always preferred that private citizens borrow through libraries. To provide articles to private citizens would overwhelm any medical library system, and I think in this case the online purchasing of articles for those outside the medical establishment fills a need.

And, yes, whenever possible we strive to obtain articles without cost and digitally. But, one must keep in mind that we also pay huge costs, even in small libraries, for digital and print medical journals (which publishers benefit from monetarily). Everyone benefits from the digital world: publishers because their journals are now being sold both in print and digitally by online vendors; libraries because we are now able to deliver articles (the primary medium for information in medicine) more quickly. This means our physicians are requesting more articles from us, since we are able to send them so quickly and own more in digital format. This too is good for publishers; if a journal is not used in my library, I cancel it. Owning it digitally means I'm more likely to provide articles from it to physicians. In the same vein, since our library can provide articles so quickly and digitally, we have had to purchase subscriptions to journals we had previously "borrowed" because we had come close to violating the "fair use" clause of the Copyright Act.

Everyone is already benefitting hugely, and the system works. I have one major complaint, however. I send my fee in routinely to the Copyright Clearance Center every year, and I strongly object to the concept that my library must pay additional monies for sending digital copies to patrons, as opposed to print (sent out by facsimile and mail). When we send an article to a patron, it is one copy of one article - whether it is digital or paper should make no difference in terms of the cost we must pay. One article is one article. The medium of information exchange should not be an issue. I think your committee should address this issue also.

Thank you.