

News in brief

NATURE TO JOIN OPEN-ACCESS PLANS

After a change in the rules of the bold open-access (OA) initiative known as Plan S, publisher Springer Nature said on 8 April that many of its non-OA journals – including *Nature* – were now committed to joining the plan, pending discussion of further technical details.

This means that *Nature* and other Nature-branded journals that publish original research will look to offer an immediate OA route after January 2021 to scientists who want it, or whose funders require it, a spokesperson says. (*Nature* is editorially independent of its publisher, Springer Nature.)

The announcement marks the first time that the publisher has said its most prestigious journals will be compliant with Plan S, meaning that researchers whose funders have joined the OA initiative should be able to continue publishing in these titles. Previously, Springer Nature had said it wanted to offer an OA route in such journals, but not unless Plan S rules changed.

“We are delighted that Springer Nature is committed to transitioning its journals to full OA,” said Robert Kiley, head of open research at the London-based biomedical funder Wellcome. Kiley is also interim coordinator for Coalition S, a group of research funders that launched Plan S in 2018 with the aim of making scholarly works free to read as soon as they are published. So far, more than 20 funders, mostly in Europe, have joined the initiative, which will kick off in 2021.



EUROPEAN RESEARCH CHIEF RESIGNS AMID CRITICISM

The president of Europe’s most prestigious funding agency has resigned after three months in the post – prompting fiery accusations from the organization’s governing body that he largely neglected his responsibilities.

Nanobiologist Mauro Ferrari stepped down from the European Research Council (ERC) on 7 April. In a statement, he said he was resigning because the European Union had not coordinated an appropriate response to the COVID-19 crisis, and that the ERC had rejected his proposal to create a programme to combat the coronavirus.

But, in a strongly worded riposte, the ERC’s 20-member governing body accused Ferrari of failing to engage with the ERC during his tenure. He didn’t participate in important meetings, spent extensive time in the United States and on external projects, and used his position to promote his own ideas in the European Commission, members of the ERC Science Council wrote on 8 April. They said they had unanimously called for his resignation on 27 March. The council adds that it could not support Ferrari’s proposal for a coronavirus-focused initiative because the ERC does not make calls for specific research topics. Ferrari did not respond to *Nature’s* request for comment.

APP DATA SUGGEST LOSS OF SMELL IS A KEY SYMPTOM OF CORONAVIRUS INFECTION

The loss of sense of smell and taste should be considered a symptom of COVID-19, suggest the first results from a UK-based symptom-tracking app. There have been many anecdotal reports of the phenomenon in relation to COVID-19, but loss of smell – known scientifically as anosmia – is not currently listed as a symptom of the disease by the World Health Organization.

The COVID Symptom Tracker smartphone app, which has recruited more than 1.5 million people in the United Kingdom, asks users to record health information on a daily basis, including potential symptoms of coronavirus infection. An analysis of data collected between 24 and 29 March found that users who tested positive for COVID-19 were three times more likely

to report losing their sense of smell than were those who had symptoms of the virus but tested negative. Of the 579 who tested positive for COVID-19, 59% reported losing their sense of smell, compared with 18% of the 1,123 who tested negative. These findings were published in a preprint on 7 April (C. Menni *et al.* Preprint at medRxiv <http://doi.org/drkq;2020>). Updated but as-yet unpublished figures from the same group show a similar trend (see ‘Tracking symptoms’). The researchers say that people experiencing loss of smell should self-isolate.

Other common symptoms reported by people who tested positive were fever, persistent cough, fatigue, diarrhoea, abdominal pain and loss of appetite.

TRACKING SYMPTOMS

On 7 April, around 60% of app users who tested positive for COVID-19 and reported symptoms had lost their sense of smell.

