

Online reprint request: Search, access, read, and update

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ABSTRACT

Online reprint request (ORR) is the standard protocol to obtain the reprints (e-print/hard copy) using the internet (author's e-mail address) when the required literature is not available. The problem of higher cost of surface mail for the author and the reader, as well as the time taken to receive postal reprints, is overcome by ORR. This technique has its limitation in message failure, expiration of mail (e-mail decay), or journal not providing author's e-mail address. This article analyzes the available practical solution to overcome these barriers. This process facilitates the exchange of scientific information. In e-mail decay, reprint request can be sent in the following order: a) search and send to author's latest e-mail address, b) co-author's latest or affiliated institution's e-mail address, c) postal reprint request providing the requestor's e-mail address. This protocol can be practiced when library facilities or required literature is not available. Literature can be pooled and used for residency teaching programs, like group discussions, journal clubs, and e-learning exercises (teleeducation), to update the recent advances for practice and research.

Key Words: E-mail decay, medical literature and education, online reprint request

INTRODUCTION

A physician updates the recent advances by periodic reading and analyzing the journals in order to deliver quality health care. Failure to update results in poor proficiency in clinical practice and can be questionable by law.^[1] Scarce availability of time and a limited area of interest confines a clinician to read only selected articles. There are various situations that make a health care professional (HCP) search non-available literature using the internet. First, articles focused on a particular specialty may be published in general medical journals or elsewhere.^[2] In an academic setting, all journals are not subscribed, and consideration of costs limits libraries to stock only important journals. Secondly, HCPs are often posted in rural areas and many work in private practice, devoid of library facility. Subscription of journals on an individual basis is expensive. Third, HINARI^[3] (Health internet work access to research initiative) is under World Health Organization program focusing on developing

countries to provide free online availability of journals and facilitate research. However, it benefits only the HCP in an institutional setting and not practitioners on an individual basis.

Reprint request (RR) is a standard protocol to access the required non-available literature by communicating with the corresponding author (CA) using his postal address. Postal RR has shown good response; however, it is time consuming and expensive for both the author and the reader.^[4] In postal RR, CA is biased and responds positively to a requestor with an academic background.^[5] Advances in information technology resulted in the practice of online reprint request (ORR). It is the ability to communicate with the author and request for reprints using the CA's e-mail address provided (internet).^[5,6] A recent study^[7] on ORR compared to postal RR has shown to overcome the disadvantages with respect to cost and time. ORR is rapid, cost-effective, and convenient.^[7]

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ORR has its limitations. Expiration of CA's e-mail from its usage is called e-mail decay.^[8] Expiration of uniform resource locator (URL) used in bibliography is called URL decay.^[9] Overall, one in four CAs' e-mail addresses become invalid.^[7] Some journals adopt the policy of not displaying the CA's e-mail address in their journal home page or pub med. These factors limit the usage of ORR. Publishing co-author's e-mail address to overcome the problem of e-mail decay is suggested.^[8] However, journals may not permit the same due to limitation of space or other technical reasons. Even if journals publish the e-mail address, usage of spam guard by the co-authors to prevent entry of junk mail can block a genuine ORR.

ORR is often neglected or not recognized. This article analyzes the available practical solution to overcome the above-mentioned problems related to ORR and enable obtaining the literature using the internet. The ORR illustrated in the article facilitates searching, obtaining, and exchanging scientific information to update the recent advances.

ONLINE REPRINT REQUEST TEMPLATE

To save time in busy schedules and avoid typing each ORR, a template can be created with Microsoft Word and stored in the system. The template should have a uniform format of subject and text message where in the subject column, it includes requestor's name prefixed with Dr. and his qualification to avoid considering it to be a junk mail. Text includes the purpose of the reprint mentioned as 'for academic work' or other reasons of the requestor and gives an option either to send the reprint in PDF format (e-print) or hard copy (requestor's postal address is also provided).

ONLINE REPRINT REQUEST PROCEDURE

The list of interesting articles is obtained either by pub med (by providing keyword on the topic) search or from journal home page (noting the table of contents) using Google search engine. To obtain an interesting article by ORR, the mail is composed using the subject and text that is copied from the stored template. CA's e-mail address, list of co-authors, page number, vol., and journal title are copied to appropriate places from the journal home page window. To save time, the above steps can be repeated with each ORR using the template stored in the system.

ONLINE REPRINT REQUEST PROTOCOL

If the corresponding author's e-mail address is available,

ORR is sent to that e-mail address and reprints are obtained. If there is message failure or e-mail decay, ORR can be sent in the following manner: Step 1: ORR to CA's latest e-mail address (Google search or pub med search for author's last known affiliated institution or noting the e-mail address of CA in his latest publications); Step 2: ORR to co-author or CA's affiliated institution; Step 3: Postal reprint request providing requestor's e-mail address. Step 1 is followed when CA's e-mail address is available. Steps 2 to 3 are followed in situations of e-mail decay or message failure.

The academic affiliation and position have got a strong influence on the author's response rate.^[4] Previous studies on postal RR showed a positive response of 84%^[3] and 72%.^[10] ORR has a (79%)^[6] very high response rate, of which 67% responded positively without reminders and 12% responded after a reminder.^[6] This fact emphasizes the importance of periodic reminders. In postal RR, author bears the cost; and with a possible hope of citation, usually responds positively to a requestor with an academic background.^[10,11] In ORR, cost factor is not involved, it is convenient to send the reprint (e-print), and author's objective to disseminate his work is achieved and hence the author responds positively. The e-mail mode meets the academic needs and the patient's needs at a lower cost, has been observed. Therefore, ORR is feasible for a HCP posted in remote areas devoid of library facilities.

Rapidity of RR response depends on the role of the requestor, author, and publisher. ORR can establish a relationship for mutual benefit among authors, readers, and publishers. Their relationship is illustrated in the Figure 1. Publisher maintains the traditional subscription model and provides free reprints (e-print) to its author. Author responds positively to RR without bias as there is no cost factor involved in mailing; and in turn, there is an advantage for the author's work as there is dissemination with a possible citation. A reader obtains the literature easily and rapidly and utilizes the author's work and puts it into practice and research [Figure 1].

The steps described in the text overcome the barrier of ORR. Postal RR addressed to the CA and providing requestor's e-mail address is a suitable approach in cases of online message failure or journals not providing CA's e-mail address on the following counts. First, postal RR reaches the place of work. Second, CA or, in case CA has changed the place of work, the co-authors can send it in e-print or hard copy. E-Print received by providing the e-mail of the requestor in the postal RR saves time and money and overcomes this problem.

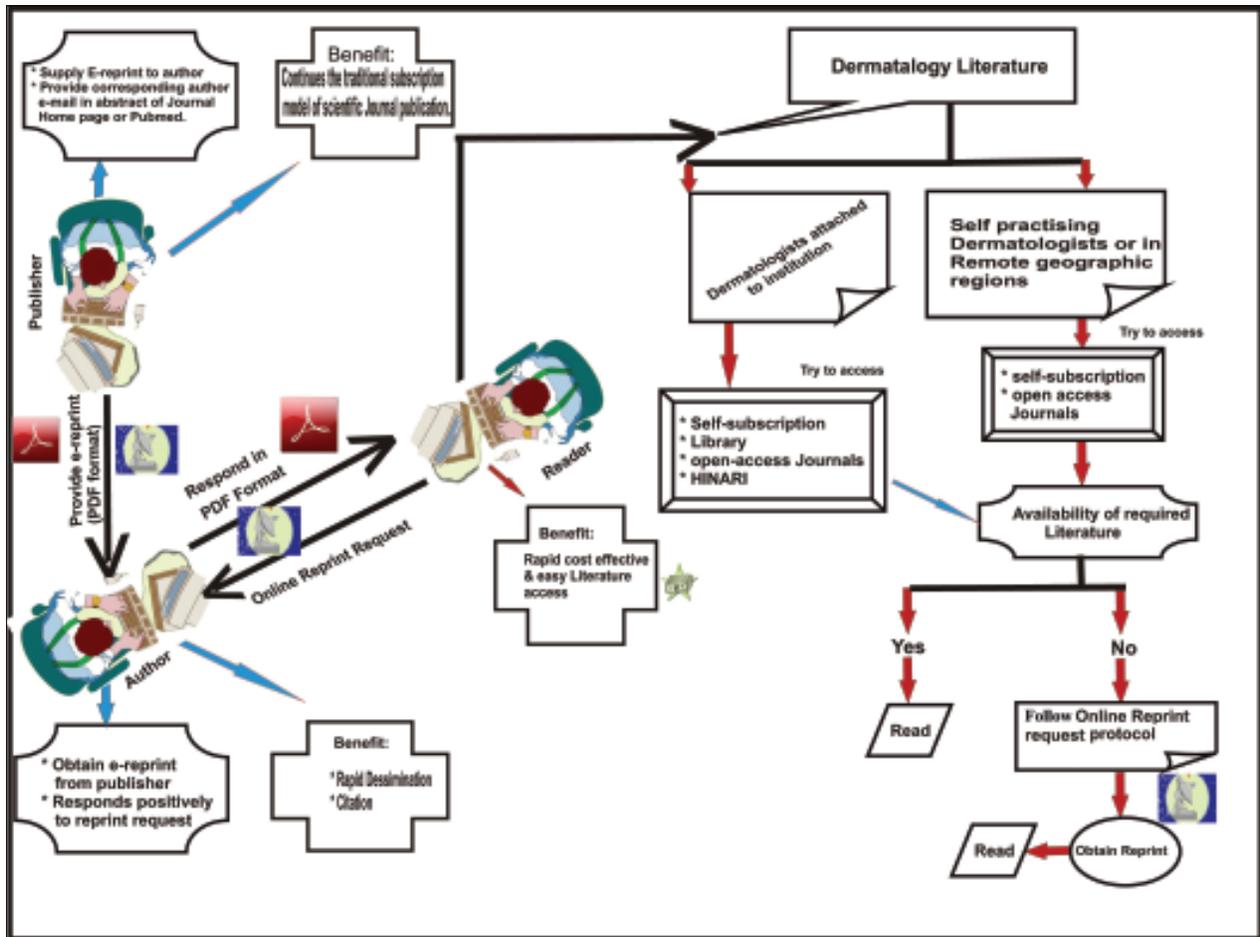


Figure 1: Relationship between the reader, author, and publisher in case of online reprint request to obtain non-available literature

CA's positive response depends on his/her objective to disseminate his/her work, so that it is utilized and cited. The purpose of RR is important and should be incorporated as it gives a fair idea to the author that the request is genuine, which is a motivation for a positive response. Residents can follow the steps illustrated in Figure to pool the literature for their seminars, journal clubs,^[12] and group discussions^[13] and obtain the non-available literature. A requestor should allow sufficient time for the receipt of the reprints, especially for authors who respond in hard copies. Therefore, they are advised to plan well in advance to meet the deadline of their scheduled teaching program.

Hartley observed sending one's publication could increase the chance of receiving the reprints.^[6] A personalized letter giving a valid reason for requesting the reprint and signature preferably on a letterhead of the requestor in case of postal reprint request and also providing the requestor's e-mail address can generate the best rapid response.

CONCLUSION

The ORR protocol or postal RR providing the requestor's email enable a physician posted in non-academic setting or remote geographic region to access biomedical literature and share the views with the authors; and it benefits practice and research.

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