

Wherefore *DMM*?

Matthew Freeman and Daniel St Johnston

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Many scientists who work on model organisms, including both of us, have been known to contrive a connection to human disease to boost a grant or paper. It's fair: after all, the parallels are genuine, but the connection is often rather indirect. *DMM* is about something quite different. This new journal is aimed at people who set out with an explicit goal to investigate human disease using model organisms.

The idea grew from a realisation that there were an increasing number of labs who were setting out to model human diseases in a range of experimentally tractable organisms, and that their efforts were starting to bear fruit. This was first apparent at major conferences where the sessions on disease models were often the most crowded and lively.

A bit of thought and further research indicated that this was indeed a rapidly developing field, and that it was a niche without a journal. This led to our proposal that the Company of Biologists launch a journal focused specifically on the use of model systems to study disease. We were clear from the outset that it should not be another broad molecular medicine journal to compete in a crowded market. Instead, we hoped it might help define an important new field and provide a service to the scientists moving into it.

Even more importantly than nucleating a community, a new journal at the right time can move science forward. As the molecular genetics and cell biology of model organisms matures, we believe that application of fundamental discoveries from these organisms will accelerate our understanding, diagnosis and treatment of human diseases. As a not-for-profit publisher that ploughs all surplus back into the community and is run by biomedical scientists, the Company of Biologists has decided to launch *DMM* not for commercial advantage (though we hope it will be successful), but because it's the right thing to do.

An important aspect of the original idea was to foster a connection between the model organism scientists and the clinicians. On the one hand, we hope to make it easier for clinicians to learn about the insights into disease mechanisms that are emerging from basic research in model systems. On the other hand, basic scientists will benefit from hearing about ways that their models can be improved to mimic the complexities of human diseases more precisely. In addition, we hope that the journal will help medics to encourage the development of new or better models for diseases. This dialogue is not necessarily easy, and may be a slow process, but this taster issue gives a flavour of the ways in which the two cultures can be bridged.

Matthew Freeman and Daniel St Johnston are on the board of the Company of Biologists and were responsible for the initial idea that led to the launch of *Disease Models & Mechanisms*. They are both group leaders in Cambridge, UK, where they work on different aspects of the developmental and cell biology of *Drosophila*. Here, they describe their vision for the journal and the reasons that led them to lobby for its birth.

Matthew Freeman is at the MRC Laboratory of Molecular Biology, Cambridge, UK
Daniel St Johnston is at the Wellcome Trust/Cancer Research UK Gurdon Institute, University of Cambridge, UK

From a scientist's perspective we aren't interested in a new journal unless it is distinct and valuable. For this reason, we were clear that we would only go ahead with the plan if we could persuade others that our vision was a good one. A practical manifestation of this principle was whether we could recruit the best people to transform our vague idea into a successful product.

We were therefore thrilled when Vivian Siegel agreed to become Editor-in-Chief. As a former editor of *Cell* and the founding executive director of PLoS and editor of *PLoS Biology*, we could not have found a more successful or prominent person to lead the project. Moreover, it sends an unmistakable signal about the quality and the impact of the journal we are launching. That Vivian has recruited such a stellar cast of founding academic editors and editorial board members further reassures us that the plan is a sound one.

We have appointed a first-rate editorial team, allowing us to take more of a backseat role, and we are confident that the journal's prospects are excellent. The people involved are the very best in the world; the science it will cover is important and expanding (and should ride the wave of increased focus on translational research); and there is an unoccupied niche to fill. It is great to see the product of a casual conversation developing into what should be an important journal that helps define an exciting field.