Exploring the UK Cancer Research Funding System through Analysis of Funding Acknowledgements: Early Results from Using a Novel Methodological Protocol

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This paper reveals the national and international funding support that UK cancer researchers benefit from, based on a snapshot of the ~8000 publications produced by UK authors in 2011. From studying the acknowledgements to funders in these papers we are able to show the contributions made by over 2500 distinct funders of research.

Acknowledgments are a rich source of data on the funding of research, but the information they carry does not conform to any recognised standard. Acknowledgements of funding support do not always appear in a dedicated section of the paper, names of funders are not standardised, or may only be referred to as grant numbers or programme names, and are often mixed in with expressions of gratitude that do not relate to financial support. The use of acknowledgments in bibliometric analysis has therefore been long limited by the unstructured nature of this data.

This paper contributes a novel method to resolving the complexities of using acknowledgments data by proposing a method to isolate and extract funding information from medical publications. We offer a series of guidelines to help make use of funders' information in the acknowledgments. We provide evidence of the accuracy of our approach by comparing its results with those available in other databases for the same set of publications (Pubmed, WoS). Finally the paper also contributes of our understanding of the UK funding system and the role played within this by charities, firms, government and universities using objective data.