

Amedeo Prize 2008

About democratic prize polls in medicine, the shut-down of Amedeo, the heroes of science, and spending money.

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Sue Weinstein in conversation with Bernd Sebastian Kamps, Amedeo President and creator of the Amedeo Prize.

Weinstein: [Amedeo](#) has launched a prize of up to 10,000 Euro for the first authors of the three most popular medical articles of the Year 2007. Isn't that a fairly small amount of money for the 329th medical prize in the world?

Kamps: Whenever you start a new project, you start at the end of the field. Even a 569th rank would therefore be comfortable – that leaves you with much room for improvement. As for the size of the prize, 10,000 Euro is hopefully just the beginning. Much more money might be available in the future, but let's talk about that later. The [Amedeo Prize](#) is for men and women who published outstanding publications in the previous year...

Weinstein: That's not so terribly new, is it?

Kamps: ...and the winners will be selected by a democratic vote...

Weinstein: ...like many other medical prizes...

Kamps: Yes, but there will be a difference of two orders of magnitude in the number of the voters. The Amedeo Prize will be selected by a vote from several thousand people who are long-time subscribers to the Amedeo Literature Service. That is unprecedented.

Weinstein: What is so unprecedented about a democratic vote of a few thousand people?

Kamps: It is the combination of quantity and quality: Amedeo subscribers are a fine selection of physicians and researchers in medical science. Take a look at the [newsletters](#) we send them every week. They contain interminable "Authors, Titles, Journals, Years of Publication, Volumes, Pages" – just bibliographic lists, nothing else. If you don't work at the frontline of medicine, you don't request this kind of information. By its very content, Amedeo selects a group of people who are extremely familiar with the scientific literature. They are the keystone of the Amedeo Prize. I frankly don't see any other medical institution capable of organizing such a large vote at this high level.

Weinstein: You told me that more than 70,000 Amedeo subscribers will be invited to take part in the selection of the prize winner...

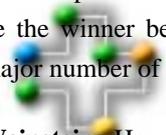
Kamps: Enough to fill most of the major football stadiums in the world.

Weinstein: A democratic vote of this dimension suggests that the winner will be the best article of 2007. But what does that mean? I could question the very idea of determining THE best article of a year.

Kamps: The concept of what is best is not an absolute value, of course. What seems best today may be considered differently in 10 years. Conversely, a small article published in Nature or Science may go relatively unnoticed today although it will ultimately prove to be a major breakthrough.

Weinstein: Does best simply mean popular?

Kamps: When determined by a large democratic vote, a prize probably measures qualities such as popularity, understandability, maybe even some degree of fashionability. In any case it measures the power to change medical practice. The winner of the Amedeo prize will be the winner because he strikes the imagination of a major number of medical specialists.



Weinstein: How can you be so sure that the selection process of the Amedeo Prize – a democratic vote by thousands of medical scientists – will be able to select just this imagination-striking article and not any low-profile article?

Kamps: We have had some experience with Internet polls. From 2004 to 2006, we organized polls to select the most popular medical websites...

Weinstein: The [GoldenLinks4Doctors](#).

Kamps: In total, we organized 20 monthly polls. Although all Amedeo subscribers could theoretically participate in any poll, about 90% of the voters were from a subset of subscribers we specifically invited and who therefore changed from month to month. Even though, and to our great surprise, the results were highly reproducible: In all [20 polls](#), PubMed was always number one; Amedeo was always number two; the New England Journal of Medicine was number three in 17 out of 20 polls, and number four to 7 were – in different orders – Medscape, PubMed Central, Free Medical Journals, and the British Medical Journal. This experience – consistent results with completely changing voting populations – was the conditio sine qua non for the Amedeo Prize scheme. I am convinced that the three voting rounds will produce outstanding data and reveal an outstanding winner.

Weinstein: So the GoldenLinks were the starting point for the Amedeo Prize?

Kamps: No, the starting point was a trivial situation on a tram in Stuttgart on October 19th, 2007. At around 5 p.m. I was sitting next to a young girl who was browsing through a youth magazine. Stories about pop stars, football players and young girls marrying millionaires. I hadn't seen this type of publication for years, and

my first thought was: Wow, what a strange world we live in. All this hype around movie stars and people running, jumping and kicking balls – while the real stars are so different: people quietly working in scientific laboratories, well away from the limelight, gathering small pieces to be added to the huge body of knowledge mankind has accumulated over the centuries. Vaccines, antibiotics, and chemical fertilizers – invented by scientists, not by football players – have laid the foundations of our present life: more people are well-nourished and in good health; less children die of childhood infections; tuberculosis is treatable; and even [HIV](#) has become manageable.

Weinstein: New heroes?

Kamps: True heroes. Scientists are the true heroes of our life. They are the people who deserve visibility. So the ultimate goal of the Amedeo Prize is to make a contribution to enhance this visibility.

Weinstein: How many Amedeo subscribers do you expect to participate in the Amedeo Prize selection?

Kamps: The selection procedure consists of one nomination phase and three voting rounds. The highest participation rate we ever achieved was 11% when we invited a subgroup of subscribers to participate in a poll about the therapeutic value of different antiretroviral drugs. For all other initiatives, which required the active contribution of our subscribers, the participation was between 3 and 5%. For the Amedeo Prize that would translate into 2,500 nominations and 2,500 votes for each of the three voting rounds.

Weinstein: What happens if nobody or, let's say, just 50 subscribers participate in the selection of the "Medical Author of the Year"?

Kamps: I'll shut Amedeo down!

Weinstein: Well, you can't shut down a service with so many subscribers, can you?

Kamps: Of course I can. Amedeo is my private pleasure. If I decide that I don't want to serve my subscribers anymore, I'll shut it down.

Weinstein: You are kidding?

Kamps: No, I'm not.

Weinstein: After all, Amedeo is being sponsored by pharmaceutical companies...

Kamps: ...which is not sufficient reason to continue Amedeo if I get the feeling that I have been providing a free service for 10 years, week after week, but am not allowed to ask for 5 minutes of concentrated work in return. If the participation in the Amedeo Prize is ridiculously low, I will pull the plug on Amedeo. There are lots of things to do in life, traveling, learning another language, promoting free medical books. After all, killing projects and giving birth to new ones is one of the most exciting options in life.

Weinstein: Please tell me that you are kidding?

Kamps: Well...

Weinstein: Please!

Kamps: OK, I am kidding. I have met extraordinary people through the Amedeo activities and I wouldn't cancel the Amedeo project just because of one single experience of frustration and disappointment. But believe me, you are too pessimistic. The participation will be overwhelming and...

Weinstein: ...so overwhelming that you added the "up to" clause of the prize description: "Amedeo Prize of up to 10,000 Euro." There is a back-door in the system, a loophole. Can you explain why?

Kamps: We stipulated that every time an Amedeo subscriber participates in the selection of the Amedeo Prize winner – either by nominating up to 7 authors or by voting in round 1, 2, or 3 – one Euro is added to the prize amount until a maximum of 10,000 Euro is reached.

Weinstein: 250 participations in each of the selection phases would create a prize of 1,000 instead of 10,000 Euro.

Kamps: Yes, that's right. I have added the "up to" clause for the – highly improbable – scenario that only a handful of Amedeo subscribers participate in the nomination and voting process. Under these circumstances, the chances that the winner be truly THE Medical Author 2007 would be slim. That's not worth 10,000 Euro.

Weinstein: And if we have 8,000 participations, the prize would be worth only 8,000 Euro?

Kamps: In that case, we would probably raise it to 10,000 anyway. The "up to" clause is just meant to make sure that a big amount of money goes to the right people. The winner of a poll of 100 subscribers might not be the right person to be awarded 10,000 Euro. But, as I said, that outcome is highly improbable and would contradict everything I learned in the last 11 years on the Internet. I sincerely believe that the participation will be massive, but we have to protect our money from going to the wrong people. After all, this is private money that my wife Patricia and I are offering.

Weinstein: You are a rich man.

Kamps: We are not poor because we would not have had the money for the prize. But we aren't rich either. Other people in our situation spend their money on cars, clothes or jewelry. Our car is 10 years old, I have three pairs of presentable shoes, and Patricia has one small diamond and doesn't want a second one. We don't smoke and don't drink. There is a huge number of objects we simply don't spend our money on. That leaves us with some free floating liquidities.

Weinstein: Fashion is stupid?

Kamps: Definitely. Don't spend your money on useless things. Spend your money on education and...

Weinstein: [Free Medical Information!](#)

Kamps: For example.

Weinstein: The [Amedeo Challenge](#) Project has recently yielded the first free medical textbook about...

Kamps: ...Tuberculosis, right. 700 pages written by an extraordinary group of 40 physicians from both sides of the Atlantic. In 6 months, [Tuberculosis 2007](#) was downloaded more than 55,000 times. A huge success.

Weinstein: But where is the educational value of the Amedeo Prize? You won't produce a book, will you?

Kamps: Before voting for an article, you will need to go through the list of nominated articles. You will read abstracts of articles you would never otherwise have seen in your life. The Amedeo Prize will stimulate the study of medical literature. Of course, I am also thinking about some kind of publication, for example a PDF with the best 20 articles to be distributed freely over the Internet. As you see, education is always on my mind. And last but not least: All Amedeo Prize webpages have multiple links to the PubMed website. The more people become familiar with PubMed, the better.

Weinstein: [PubMed](#), the most popular medical website in the world...

Kamps: ...and the most important one. PubMed is by far the number one of all medical websites and a major single achievement in building a free information environment in medicine. I deeply admire the people who made the decision to make all these data freely available in 1996.

Weinstein: Have you ever met them?

Kamps: No, I haven't, but I would like to.

Weinstein: May I ask you some more specific questions about the Amedeo Prize?

Kamps: Sure.

Weinstein: How secret is the vote for the Amedeo Prize?

Kamps: Extremely secret. Only my brother Stephan, who is the chief software developer at Amedeo, and myself will have access to the poll data. Needless to say that the poll data will never be made public.

Weinstein: How is the prize money distributed?

Kamps: The winner of the Amedeo Prize is the first author of the article with the highest number of points in the final voting round. He receives a bonus of 30% of the prize money. The remaining 70% is proportionally divided among the first authors of the three articles with the highest number of points. The winner will return home with 60 to 70% of the award money.

Weinstein: In the [timetable](#) of your website, you announce an Annual Amedeo Prize Ceremony. Where will it take place?

Kamps: It is still too early to talk about that. Again, it all depends on the participation of the Amedeo subscribers. If we receive 250 nominations and 250 votes in each of the three voting rounds, the Amedeo prize would be limited to 1,000 Euro, that is about 600 Euro for the winner and even less for the other two winners. In this case, we would make a bank transfer and cancel the ceremony.

Weinstein: And in the case of overwhelming participation?

Kamps: Overwhelming participation would enable us to organize special category votings for infectious diseases, oncology, cardiovascular diseases, etc. I would start making phone calls in February to see if we could get further support. With 100,000 Euro we would create one main award of 50,000 Euro and 7 smaller awards for the special categories. At this point, we would organize the Award Ceremony.

Weinstein: Which city would you select to stage the ceremony?

Kamps: Before May 2007, I would have celebrated it in Paris, but that is not an option anymore.

Weinstein: Why not?

Kamps: For some personal reason, but this is not the place to talk about it. I have an excellent alternative in mind, but I won't talk about that either.

Weinstein: Do you have any idea who will be the "Medical Author of the Year 2007"?

Kamps: Not the slightest idea. Do you want to have a guess?

Weinstein: It is almost an impossible question, isn't it?

Kamps: Yes, it is. But think about it: There is someone out there in the world who has published an important article in a prestigious journal...

Weinstein: He or she?

Kamps: I don't care, but for simplicity, let's say "he". ...someone out there in the world who is proud and sat-

isfied of an article he has recently published in a major journal. He reasonably expects the article to promote his career. He is highly motivated to continue his research. He is enthusiastic and is able to transmit his enthusiasm to his younger co-workers. But he is light-years away from imagining that in only 7 months he will be declared THE "Medical Author of the Year". He is out there but we don't know who he is.

Weinstein: Not yet.

Kamps: But we will. Very soon. Isn't that fantastic?