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In 2001, the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine was awarded to Leland H. Hartwell, R. Timothy Hunt and Sir Paul M. Nurse “for their discoveries of key regulators of the cell cycle”. The Sveriges Riksbank Prize in Economic Sciences in the same year was awarded to George A. Akerlof, A. Michael Spence and Joseph E. Stiglitz “for their analyses of markets with asymmetric information”.

The annual rate of increase in total citation inflow to the growing collection of these Nobel laureates’ papers did not change appreciably after 2001. But was there any change in the reason for these citations being made?

It does not appear so. Professor Kathleen Gould, of the Vanderbilt University School of Medicine, Nashville, USA comments that she cites Nurse’s work “because 1) some are also my papers and I cite my old work as background for my new work and 2) our work overlaps in subject matter. I haven’t changed my citation patterns since 2001”.

Professor Paul Russell of The Scripps Research Institute, La Jolla, USA echoes this: “There was no change for my reasons in citing his work after his receipt of the Nobel Prize. I was [already] well acquainted with his work, and he was already a highly respected and influential leader in my field of research, so the prize didn’t really change my citation pattern.”

The Nobel Prize also seems to have had no effect on the reasons for Stiglitz’ publications being cited, despite economics having very different citation characteristics from physiology and medicine. Professor Philip Arestis of Cambridge University states: “The reason I cited [him] is very obvious: he had undertaken and published relevant and good work; that is the reason and nothing else.”