



Editorial

Protect your scientific reputation: Beware of predatory journals!

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This editorial is a cautionary one, advising you to avoid being caught out by predatory journals.

I have been researching and publishing for many years. As my publications have appeared online, this has resulted in email invitations from predatory journals urging me to submit my manuscript to them. I sometimes receive 3-4 emails each week asking me to submit. Such emails often contain effusive greetings, mention of a paper I have published, and promises of fast publication after a rigorous but fast review - but no word of the publication cost. Being a journal editor for years has made me very suspicious of such unsolicited invitations. I try to block such emails and delete them.

In our 'publish or perish' academic environments, researchers and academics feeling the pressure of getting published fast sometimes deliberately set out to publish papers quickly in predatory journals (1). They see this as an expedited process to achieve a reasonable publication rate. However, this might prove quite detrimental to their scientific careers when the rigor of their research or scholarly activity is closely examined.

Too often, I hear of graduate students or novice researchers writing a paper for the predatory journal. They get caught up in a costly process if they decide to pay the journal after manuscript acceptance. Some are happy to know their paper has been accepted despite the cost. These new researchers may have only published one or two articles and have not yet fully appreciated the benefits of a good peer

review of their work. But even experienced researchers can get caught in this process as predatory journals become more sophisticated or challenging to identify.

So, what are predatory journals?

'Predatory' means preying on others or exploiting them for gain. Today many predatory journals cause frustration and time-wasting and undermine good science through fraud or publishing poor-quality research. Predatory journals take hefty fees from authors without subjecting their manuscripts to rigorous peer review or careful editing. As a result, articles may be published online riddled with grammatical problems, poor structure, and unchallenged mistakes in methodology, data analysis, study conclusions, or unproven claims.

Predatory journals have increased in many disciplines over the last two decades, especially since the rise of open-access (OA) journals on the Internet. Such journals are meant to give free OA information, usually research findings (1). Open-access journals are a laudable achievement, especially for those with poor or no access to journals requiring a content subscription. Hard copy journals are now reducing, as technology has enabled us to access information at our fingertips at the computer. We want to get our hands on information fast, without going to our library while the information is current.

While the growth in OA journals is good news, there is usually a high cost to publishing. The profit margins for some OA journals can be high. The desire for easy money has

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encouraged dishonest and dodgy fraudsters to set up predatory journals online.

The home page of these predatory journals may have information copied from the home pages of reputable journals. The journal name is often similar to a respected journal in a professional field to add credence to the fraud. Little information is given about the cost of publishing, and the members of the editorial board are usually not well-known (2). Predatory journals may also have a list of published articles, many of which are fake and often claim to have a high impact factor.

So how to avoid predatory journals?

If you unknowingly submit a manuscript to a predatory journal, you may feel happy to have it accepted quite quickly. But, surprise, an emailed invoice arrives requesting payment, often equivalent to hundreds or thousands of dollars. This invoice is for the supposed article processing fees (3). Some shocked and unsuspecting authors are tricked into paying their invoice due to further emailed pressure from the journal or are too embarrassed to admit to others what has happened. If only a small percentage of authors pay up, this is a lucrative scam for the predatory journal. If you have submitted and get one of those demanding emails for payment, don't be tempted to answer or feel you must pay up. Block all emails from the journal. There is no legal obligation to an illegitimate enterprise.

First, do your homework to determine if the journal is legitimate, even if this seems tricky. Check with a librarian about the journal you want to submit because they often have resources and training to spot predatory journals. Check if the journal is indexed in SCI, SSCI, or another index. Still, be cautious, though. "Unfortunately, some fake journals have made their way into reputable databases, such as PubMed, PubMed Central, MEDLINE, SCOPUS, and Web of Science" (4, p.319), often due to the similarity of the journal's name with a legitimate one. Talk to other researchers with a strong publishing history to get their opinion, but if you have doubts about a journal, listen to your intuition!

A simple guide is first to scrutinize the journal's website. And read articles on predatory publishing. These simple steps might save you a lot of money and your reputation.

See the MD Anderson Medical Library homepage (2), which reads:

“How can you spot a predatory journal?”

1. Do you or your colleagues know the journal? Do you recognize the editorial board?
2. Can you easily contact the publisher?
3. Is the journal clear about its peer review process?
4. Is it clear what fees will be charged?

If the answer is no for any of these questions, the journal is most likely questionable, if not predatory.”

Read Section 7—suggested features of predatory journals in the article by mentioned below Duc et al. below (4). Here you will find more in-depth and valuable information about identifying a predatory journal.

Nurse educators and researchers must learn about predatory journals and teach their students and other novice researchers about the dangers of submitting articles to these journals. I believe the topics of predatory journals and predatory conferences should be included in every graduate research course. Perhaps nurses in the Middle East might consider adding predatory journals as a topic at relevant forthcoming conferences.

Don't take shortcuts to publish; learn more about predatory publishing and spread the word. After all, good science demands the vigilance and efforts of all of us, especially as nursing science is growing and developing significantly worldwide.

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