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Letter to the Editor

Predatory publishing: Writers beware!

Dear Editor,

Apropos the timely editorial on FAQs of scientific writing.¹ Across the spectrum of the medical profession, from the fresh entrants to the jaded veteran specialists, there may always be the secretly nurtured desire to publish, however blasé the protestations to the contrary may be. Or else, a regulatory body requirement, or norms for post-graduation, may compel the average medical practitioner to seek recourse to the Banshee like charms of tempting inbox email messages. “Your manuscript will be published in a fast track mode, in a peer reviewed journal, with international accessibility through web indexing services. Pay only nominal processing charges!” Aspiring academics might thus be persuaded to publish in such a journal which has questionable objectives.

With the proliferation of e-commerce, and an exploitation of the felt need of the medical profession, the paradigm of predatory publishing is required to be known to the potential contributor to the scientific literature. Hence, apart from avoiding known evils like plagiarism and unethical research, the budding author also needs to steer away from misspent effort, in publishing his work in a ‘psuedo-journal’.

A comprehensive and updated list of such journals and publishers of disrepute is maintained by Beall.² These unethical publishers (many being infamously from our Sub-continent) seek their clientele from amongst the novices, and the ‘desperate’, through aggressive marketing and spam emails. There may be almost no quality control and definitely no transparency about review processes and charges. Concerned professionals need to wake up to the reality that merely ‘outing’ these journals will not suffice. It is essential to conduct a concerted campaign focusing on the subscribers to these malpractices in scientific communication.³

Predatory publishing is often confused with ‘open access’ publishing. The interested reader is referred to perspectives on this ‘collaborative’ publishing.^{4,5} Beall’s concerns are not about open-access per se, but about exploitation of the peer-review process and publishing practices. An interesting narrative on predatory publishing practices has been given recently with a slew of articles now on Pubmed.⁶

To avoid such predatory journals, young and freshly initiated researchers would benefit by including the

following questions in their check list, while selecting a suitable journal for their work: Is the journal/publisher included in the Beall’s list; Is the journal included in a consensus validated database (check for it and don’t just accept a journal’s claim for it); Is the journal transparent in its peer review process, editorial policies and ownership disclosures; are the costs associated with publication clearly specified?

Publication in the scientific literature brings a medical professional’s ideas and research to the public and establishes intellectual property rights too. However, in the mad scramble to publish, authors also need to keep in mind yet another paradigm, i.e. h-index, which attempts to measure both the productivity and citation impact of the published body of work of a scientist!⁷

There can be no conclusion to efforts to orient the prospective writer, however it is amusing to note the advent of ‘publish or perish’ software in the e-market.⁸

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