

Avoiding Predatory Publishers*

What is predatory publishing?

Academic publishing is undergoing a shift from pay-to-read to pay-to-publish. Pay-to-publish journals, more commonly known as open access journals, are free to read but charge the authors an upfront article publishing fee. Although many open access journals are credible and reputable, there is a growing and thriving black-market economy of open access journals that take advantage of authors and the academic pressure to publish. These “predatory journals” are disguised as genuine scholarly publications but instead publish whatever the author submits in return for the payment of an article processing charge. This publishing approach not only poses a threat to the authors and their reputation but also compromises the integrity of the scientific and medical literature.

How big is the problem?

Number of scientific journals = ~28,000

Estimated number of predatory journals = 8000

Estimated number of predatory medical journals = 1200-1500

Common characteristics of predatory publishers

- Disguised as an open access publisher, whereby content is made freely available by the publisher to read and is usually funded by publication fees (i.e., article processing charges)
- Primary goal is to make money (through fees)
- Does not care about the quality of the work published (i.e., little or no editing, no peer review)
- Makes false claims or promises (e.g., claims of high impact factors or indexing)
- Engages in unethical business practices (e.g., does not seek peer review as advertised)
- Fails to follow accepted standards or best practices of scholarly publishing

*Adapted from Gastel B., Good B., Kemper M. Talk presented at: AMWA 2018 Medical Writing and Communication Conference; November 2, 2018; Washington DC. Predatory Publishing: Issues and Advice. AMWA.org/2018sessions. Accessed November 19, 2018.

Warning signs that a journal may be predatory

- The researcher receives an obsequious-sounding email asking them to submit an article, with unusual promises such as a quick time to publication
- Publication fees (article processing charges), often not clearly described on the journal's website, are due at the time of submission (legitimate open access journals typically only charge fees when the article is accepted after peer review)
- Disclosure of conflicts of interest is not requested
- The journal's peer-review process is not prominently displayed on the journal's website, or reviewer comments are not provided before the article is accepted for publication
- The submission system is not an established system (e.g., Editorial Manager) and seems overly simple
- The journal is not indexed in PubMed/Medline
- The language used on the journal's website is awkward, with misspellings, misuse of verbal and noun constructions, etc.
- The journal is very new
- The publisher claims to publish an entire stable of journals in many different fields
- No one on the journal editorial board is an expert or a prominent researcher in the field
- The editorial office's address is not prominently provided or does not appear to be legitimate when searched online (e.g., by using Google Maps)
- Sample articles do not appear to be of high quality

Although these are warning signs that a journal may be predatory, the presence of one or more of these characteristics does not necessarily mean that the journal is predatory.

How to determine whether a journal is a known predatory journal

- Consult Beall's archived list of predatory publishers and journals
 - <https://beallslist.weebly.com/>
 - Site includes an updated list of publishers and journals that may be predatory
- Search the Directory of Open Access Journals
 - <https://doaj.org/>
 - This online directory indexes and provides access to high-quality, peer-reviewed open access journals

- Search the Norwegian Register for Scientific Journals, Series and Publishers
 - <https://dbh.nsd.uib.no/publiseringskanaler/Forside>
 - This searchable list, maintained by the Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, consists of national and international journals that have established procedures for peer review and an academic editorial board
- Evaluate the journal by using the “Think Check Submit” checklist
 - <https://thinkchecksubmit.org/>
 - This easy-to-use checklist was created to help researchers determine whether a journal can be trusted

Additional resources

- “What I learned from predatory publishers” by Jeffrey Beall. *Biochemia Medica* 2017:27:273-278
<http://www.biochemia-medica.com/en/journal/27/2/10.11613/BM.2017.029>
- “Open access, power and privilege” by Shea Swauger. *Coll & Res Librar News* 2017:78
<https://crln.acrl.org/index.php/crlnews/article/view/16837/18435>
- [Understanding Predatory Publishers](#)
 - An introductory guide from Iowa State University’s library
- [What Is a Predatory Conference?](#)
 - From the International Family Nursing Association
- [Open Access, A2K & Scholarly Communication: Predatory Publishers](#)
 - From the University of the Witwatersrand Libraries, South Africa

Predatory publishing in the news

- “[Many Academics Are Eager to Publish in Worthless Journals](#)” by Gina Kolata (*New York Times*, October 30, 2017)
- “[Medical Journals Have a Fake News Problem](#)” by Esmé E Deprez and Caroline Chen (*Bloomberg Businessweek*, October 29, 2017)
- “[China awaits controversial blacklist of ‘poor quality’ journals](#)” by David Cyranoski (*Nature*, October 16, 2018)

- [“Journal blacklists: show your working”](#) in *Nature*, October 16, 2018
- [“Adventures with Predatory Publishing: A Tale of Two Journals”](#) by Peter Burns (*Front Matter*, Issue 29, 2014). See “Phony vs Legit” infographic, pages 4-5.

For more information or, if you would like assistance with determining whether a particular journal or publisher may be predatory, please contact Stephen Palmer (spalmer@texasheart.org or 832-355-8902) in Scientific Publications.