

EDITORIAL**Predatory journals****-Dinesh Fernando-**

The aim of the scientific community, or any researcher, is to share their knowledge and research findings with the rest of the world. To this end, scientific journals play a large role. In this e-era, with so many spurious / bogus claims spreading as fast as the delta variant of the corona virus, it is important to have peer reviewed scientific publications which can be trusted. However, with the advent of open access journals, this long held trust in academic publications have been shaken. This is due to the proliferation of journals that charge the author article processing fees (APC), but do not sufficiently provide the vetting by peers, required of academic publishing. These are the pseudo journals; more commonly known as predatory journals. These generally publish low quality articles, which do not undergo the expected stringent publishing practices of legitimate journals, since their main goal is financial gain¹.

The three pillars of scholarly publishing – business ethics, research ethics and publishing ethics² – are washed away on a wave of financial greed and easy money. The promise of publication in a “reputable” journal with a high “impact factor” with short turnaround times, in return for a relatively low fee, tempts researchers, particularly from low and middle income countries - with no institutional support for publications - to submit their papers; thus, being easy ‘prey’ to these ‘predatory’ journals. In the most extreme cases, the articles are published on line without any peer or editorial review / corrections as soon as it is submitted.

By no means are all open access journals using the gold (author pays) model of questionable quality.

However, it cannot be denied that they face a great temptation to accept unworthy manuscripts: on one hand, the more they accept the greater the profit margins, while on the other hand, if they reject it their income is reduced - and most likely it will be accepted by a competitor journal.

It cannot be denied that some graduate students and academics, caught in the ‘publish or perish’ cycle, choose to submit and publish their work in ‘questionable’ journals, in order to fulfill requirements of a degree or promotion. Hence, they are not ‘prey’, and therefore the term ‘pseudo’ journals, is preferred³. Checking of each and every journal listed by the applicant for authenticity and quality by the evaluator, is easier said than done. Senior academics have been slow to recognize the proliferation of these spurious journals: they published in an era of subscription journals which were well respected and of good quality. The established high quality subscription journals were governed by a high level of research integrity at all levels – from researchers to peer reviewers to editors to readers. Therefore, the findings were accepted without question and used by other researchers for future research. With the advent of spurious journals the appearance of spurious research is inevitable.

More and more questionable medical or pseudo medical research is being published, which makes it more difficult for authors – and evaluators – to sift through when citing papers. Not only publishing in pseudo journals, but also citation of pseudo journals should not be encouraged; not only since the authenticity and quality of the publication is questionable, but also, since citations indirectly promote these journals.

Subscription journals use an in-built quality control system. Since there is a limited budget for publishing an issue, only the best papers are selected; therefore, the readers (and the libraries purchasing these journals) were presented with high quality articles. This in turn prompted more authors submitting better papers and thereby the quality

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was improved. In the 'gold' open access model there is no increased cost involved in publishing more and more papers, and therefore, the publishers may be prone to accept lower quality papers rather than rejecting them. This cycle continues in the exact opposite way of the subscription model.

Is there a compromise between these two models? Yes there is; the "diamond model" where the publisher does not charge article processing fees from the author. The cost is borne by the institution publishing the journal. The articles are freely available (like in gold), while the quality can be maintained as there is no financial conflict involved in the decision making process. The quality is maintained like the subscription model, with the advantages of open access leading to wider readership and more citations. The Sri Lanka Journal of Forensic Medicine, Science and Law follows this model; the University of Peradeniya bears the publishing costs. If all academic institutions adopt this model it will pave the way to a boon of open access publishing, ending the bane of predatory journals.

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