

LETTERS

The Predator and Prey of Publishing Research

To the Editor: “Publish or perish.” It is the mantra for faculty members seeking promotion and/or tenure at colleges and schools of pharmacy. Scholarly publications are an important component of a faculty member’s dossier and one that we work hard to maintain throughout our careers. Faculty members suffer the hardship of manuscript rejection many times throughout our careers, especially early on when we are beginning to understand the process of clinical and academic research. It is especially difficult when a research manuscript has been rejected several times, and the author(s) is/are desperately searching for a journal that will accept it. To meet the need to publish, there has been an uprising of predatory “open-access” journals to which authors may submit manuscripts. Their presence is enticing to faculty authors seeking publication after their first, second, third, (and sometimes) fourth submissions have been rejected by reputable journals.

In 2014, Bowman published a special article discussing predatory and questionable practices in publishing, drawing attention to this problem for the first time in the *American Journal of Pharmaceutical Education*.¹ Not all open-access journals are predatory; instead, the means by which the journal uses (or fails to use) the peer-review process makes it predatory. Many open-access journals, including this one, follow a rigorous peer-review process to ensure relevance and validity of author submissions. However, predatory journals are lesser known, can be part of a larger network of journals, or have a wide range of publication costs in order to “maintain open access for their content.” Poor predatory journals or organizations also may have incomplete websites, misspellings, or grammatical issues on their sites, obviously falsified authors, and/or reference editors and reviewers who do not exist or do not publicly state they are associated with the journal.²

The label “(predatory) open-access journal” is not a formal designation, and the legitimacy of such journals can be accepted or ignored based on individual opinions. Faculty members, residents, students, and tenure and promotion committees may pay as little or as much attention to these types of journals as they wish. The goal is to know they exist and be cognizant of their impact on academic careers and dissemination of research results.

The risk of these predatory journals is not limited to new or junior faculty members, but also to authors unaware of a journal’s status or if it is classified as predatory. The risk is the same for promoted or senior faculty

members. The authors of this letter are a faculty member of 10 years and a new residency graduate. Both have first-hand experience being misled, despite performing what seemed to be a reasonable background check on the integrity of the journal and publisher.³ In hindsight, we missed several clues and took them for granted prior to submission. From submission to acceptance, the journal required 20 days, with only 10 days required for the peer-review process. The acceptance letter recommended the manuscript be published as submitted. The submission was slated to be published less than one month from its acceptance, pending a \$200 payment to a country not affiliated with any contact numbers or addresses on the journal or publisher’s site.

To prevent others from making our mistake, we submit this letter. Authors have a higher likelihood of spotting a predatory open-access journal by referring to Jeffrey Beall’s lists of predatory open-access publishers and stand-alone journals.⁴ Beall maintains a regularly updated list of journals and publishers considered predatory. Although this is a comprehensive list, it is not necessarily complete. Authors always should be suspicious of journals not well-known within the profession. If authors have suspicion about a journal, and it is not included on Beall’s list, they may perform their own evaluation by using Beall’s criteria for determining predatory open access publishers.⁵

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