



# How can emergency physicians protect their work in the era of pseudo publishing?



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## ARTICLE INFO

### Article history:

Received 26 September 2017

Accepted 8 November 2017

Available online 15 November 2017

### Keywords:

Fake journal

Hijacked journal

Open access

Predatory journal

Predatory publishing

Pseudo publishing

## ABSTRACT

Recently scientists have been targets of pseudo journals (fake, hijacked or predatory journals). These journals provide a low barrier to publication and quick publication times compared to high quality journals and exploit the pay-to-publish system in order to charge publication fees but they provide no formal peer-review. We aim to increase awareness among emergency physicians about pseudo journals.

Trying to list all of fake, hijacked or predatory journals is not the solution because new journals are launched almost everyday and the fast proliferation of journals makes it difficult to identify and list all of them. Only an understanding of the practices and markers of legitimate and predatory publishers will allow the researcher to keep pace with danger because fraud is an ever-changing field.

In this review we offer basic information (our top list of strategies and potential red flags) to recognize these journals to avoid submission and suggest some solutions if a paper has already been submitted or published in these journals.

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## 1. Introduction

Recently scientists have been targets of pseudo journals (fake, hijacked or predatory journals). Pseudo journals have thrived because academicians feel pressure to publish for promotion, pay rise, reputation etc. and this is forcing researchers to publish more papers in a shorter time. These journals provide a low barrier to publication and quick publication times compared to high quality journals that mostly have high rejection rates.

Authors who publish in pseudo journals tend to be younger researchers from developing countries who have less experience.<sup>1</sup> Many researchers in developing countries who submit their work to predatory journals do not have enough information about pseudo publishing.<sup>2</sup> Contrary to the traditional model where librarians and readers were the customers of journals, individual authors are customers of journals now and sometimes they are unable to distinguish between legitimate and fake, hijacked or

predatory journals.<sup>3</sup>

Our stance is certainly not against open access (OA) publishing since it has its advantages of ensuring rapid and widespread dissemination of scientific research and we are aware that most of OA journals are legitimate. We know that just because a journal is from a given publisher does not automatically make it legitimate or high quality and ignoring the predatory and/or unscholarly behavior of some of the larger mainstream publishers – is clearly biased.<sup>4</sup>

We only aim to increase awareness among especially young emergency physicians about pseudo journals and to offer basic information to recognize these journals to avoid submission and to suggest some strategies if their work has already been submitted or published in these journals.

## 2. Hijacked journals

This term refers to the creation of a fake website that simulates the website of a legitimate journal to fool authors who believe they are sending to their work to the legitimate journal and to charge article fees. There is actually no journal where the work is being published in.<sup>5</sup>

If the authentic journal has a website, hijackers may duplicate it.

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Peer review under responsibility of The Emergency Medicine Association of Turkey.

If the journal is a print only one, hijackers create a website and claim that it is the real journal's website. If the journal's website is not in English, then they create a website that is in English and claim that it is the English webpage for the authentic journal.<sup>5</sup>

### 3. Fake journals

A fake journal is different from a hijacked journal in that a person or organization has never registered it. The so-called journal simply does not exist. They have fake ISSN numbers that never have been assigned to any journal by ISSN organization.<sup>6</sup>

### 4. Predatory journals

Predatory publishing is a relatively recent phenomenon defined by University of Colorado Denver librarian Jeffrey Beall who came up with the term.<sup>7</sup> These journals exploit the gold OA model where the author pays for article processing charges. Since their motivation is financial gain they charge publication fees without providing services they pretend to give like editorial or peer review or digital archiving and maintain a low to nonexistent standard of quality control.<sup>3,8,9</sup> Predatory journals try to find articles through spam emails, promising very quick review and OA publication for a publication fee. There is virtually no transparency about processes and fees.<sup>3</sup> The publishers make profit and the authors enhance their curriculum vitae (CV).<sup>9</sup>

Even indexed journals may have predatory practices. Some publishers buy a reputable journal that has been indexed previously and instantly change the frequency of publishing to receive more articles and make more money until their practice is recognized.<sup>10</sup>

Each week, academic authors receive several email requests to publish in these journals, become a reviewer or and editor for them.<sup>9</sup> Most researchers will delete these emails, but some are deceived.<sup>3</sup> A recent analysis of the authors of articles in predatory journals found that authors are more likely to be junior and from developing countries.<sup>8</sup> These journals and their authors are mostly located in developing countries such as India, Pakistan, Iran, Turkey, Nigeria, Malaysia.<sup>1,8,9</sup> There is also a recent article that argues that more than half of the corresponding authors in these journals are hailed from high- and upper-middle-income countries as defined by the World Bank.<sup>11</sup>

### 5. Why not to submit in predatory journals

Some of these journals only appear for weeks and then disappear causing the articles to vanish and your work to get lost.<sup>8</sup> If the publishing company goes out of business the manuscripts may be no longer available because they have no digital content preservation. Since the articles are not indexed in reputable library systems, they are not visible to other researchers.<sup>3</sup>

People with bogus scientific credentials may fill up universities and this may damage the quality of scientific environment. It creates an advantage in favor of dishonest ones against honest researchers especially if the academic evaluation system relies too much on one's number of publications rather than quality of them.<sup>7</sup> While publishing your work may seem an easy way to boost your CV, having these journals on your CV may raise questions about the credibility of authors and integrity of your work. A negative stigma may be attached to a scientist who constantly choose to publish in pseudo journals, even if their work is perfectly valid, and academically sound. These are some of the consequences of publishing in pseudo journals as a result of honest mistake.<sup>9</sup>

The metric values and other indexing measures developed by scientific indexing databases are affected because of citations of

articles that are published in hijacked and fake journals.<sup>6</sup>

Most importantly in the long run predatory publishing undermines public trust in the validity of scientific publication and is a waste of resources.<sup>9,11</sup> These journals are destructive on the validity and reliability of medical research.<sup>6</sup>

### 6. How to recognize these journals

Trying to list all of fake, hijacked or predatory journals is not the solution because new journals are launched almost everyday and the fast proliferation of journals makes it difficult to identify and list all of them. Some of these journals exist for a short time and disappear before they can be listed anywhere.<sup>3</sup> Some of them look so real that they can even fool Thomson Reuters.<sup>5</sup> Some authors would suggest to stick with widely known journals or strict lists but we disagree with that practice because that would be unfair to newly established legitimate journals and would ease monopolizing.<sup>3,7</sup> It would also be hard for junior researchers to get their work published in those top journals thus causing a disadvantage against them.

Determining whether a journal is truly predatory is difficult. A legitimate journal may be mistaken for a predatory one especially in the beginning of its establishment. One might easily mislabel small or nascent OA publishers lacking societal support or financial infrastructure as predatory because of their fees.<sup>12</sup> In the early stages of their development journals cannot offer wider discovery in established search services.<sup>12</sup>

Only an understanding of the practices and markers of legitimate and predatory OA publishers will allow the researcher to keep pace with danger because methods of fraud is changing fast.<sup>12</sup>

There are some suggested methods to protect your work by different authors; we have listed our top 10 for emergency physicians below and summarized a top 5 list in [Table 1](#). Below is also a detailed explanation of the items in [Table 1](#).

1. Ignore emails requesting article submissions or offering editorial board memberships from questionable publishers.<sup>13</sup>
2. Do an internet search about the journal to see if there is any information about fraud.<sup>14</sup>
3. Check Beall's list: Beall's website is closed on Jan 15, 2017, but is still available in web archives.<sup>11,15</sup> Beall's list included 1294 journals which he believed was predatory. He unfortunately put some legitimate journals and publishers that are from low and middle income countries to his black list by mistake.<sup>16</sup> Thus WAME advises against the use of Beall's lists as a single method to define if a journal is predatory.
4. Check DOAJ list: DOAJ indexes high quality peer reviewed OA journals and this list can serve as a white list. However not all legitimate journals are on DOAJ's list so there is still a chance a journal is not predatory even if it is not listed.<sup>16</sup>
5. Check the papers published in the journal in the past, read a few of the articles in the journal to assess the quality of science before submitting your work.<sup>14,17</sup> Choose to submit your research to journals that you would normally find interesting and relevant.<sup>12</sup>

**Table 1**

How to avoid sending your work to a predatory journal.

Our top 5 list before submission
Look for the journal in an internet search engine
Use Think. Check. Submit approach
Check Bealls list
Check DOAJ list
When in doubt, ask a more experienced colleague to help you

6. Look for potential red flags.
7. Look up the journal title in Hansoti et al.'s article.<sup>12</sup>
8. Use the WAME algorithm.<sup>16</sup>
9. Use Think. Check. Submit approach.<sup>17,18</sup>
10. When in doubt, ask a more experienced colleague to help you.

#### Potential Red Flags:

1. Publishing fees are not clearly stated on the website.<sup>14,17</sup>
2. Promising very rapid peer review and publication times.<sup>9,19,20</sup>
3. Publishing processes are not transparent, policies are not stated.
4. Guidelines for authors are not detailed or specific or verbatim from other publishers.
5. Editorial board is filled with academicians without their permission or consent or with people not experts in the field.<sup>14,17</sup>
6. The publisher's full contact information including the address is lacking on the journal website.<sup>9,17</sup>
7. The journal sends persistent flattering emails.<sup>9</sup>
8. Journal website is poorly maintained and full of grammatical errors and misspellings.<sup>9,12</sup>
9. The journal publishes special edition or guest edited issues frequently.<sup>21</sup>
10. The journal uses a bogus metrics listed in Dadkhah et al.'s article like universal impact factor, global impact factor, journal impact factor.<sup>2,22</sup>
11. Uses non-reputable indexing such as Indian Science indexing or falsely claims to be indexed in legitimate services.<sup>2</sup>
12. The number of articles in each issue is massive.<sup>2</sup>
13. Journal's scope and name is excessively broad including more than one discipline of science.<sup>12,18</sup>
14. The journal does not follow the recommendations in document 'Principles of Transparency and Best Practice in Scholarly Publishing'.<sup>23</sup>

#### 7. What can you do if you already submitted to a pseudo journal?

Some authors may end up publishing their articles in pseudo journals without realizing that it is fake, hijacked or predatory. Since the number of these journals is increasing, it is necessary to find a solution for legitimate papers published in these journals.<sup>24</sup>

1. Authors who have been victims of pseudo journals should share their experiences with other researchers.<sup>16</sup>
2. If the author realizes that the journal is a pseudo one after acceptance but before copyright transfer than he should not sign the copyright transfer form.<sup>24</sup>
3. If there is any doubt authors should withhold payment until constructive criticism is received from at least 2 reviewers.<sup>25</sup>
4. Authors whose work has been published in a pseudo journal should try to contact the journal's office and retract their article although unfortunately most pseudo journals will simply oppose that.<sup>12,24</sup>
5. Some authors suggest that papers published in **fake or hijacked journals** can be published in another legitimate journal and this should not be considered as duplicate publication, because these articles need to be considered as stolen papers and most of the fake websites will be offline and the articles will disappear and won't be accessible anyway.<sup>26</sup> We agree with that since these articles can not be considered published rather they are

only placed on a website mostly temporarily. These articles need to be evaluated without prejudice and can be published if they pass editorial and peer review just like any other article. Alternatively the authors can also republish their findings in a new form by writing a new paper.<sup>24</sup> We do not suggest that because it may cause the two different papers derived from the same data set to be considered as two different studies and thus duplicate the studies effect in meta analysis.

6. The situation is a little more complicated with predatory journals since there is a possibility that some of the journals from developing countries cannot comply with higher standards or they may be newly established legitimate journals making honest mistakes. It is not always easy to classify a journal as predatory. In our opinion if these papers are republished it would constitute double publication.
7. In all cases authors must only republish their own papers<sup>25</sup> and they must give information to the editor of the second journal about the situation during submission.<sup>26</sup>

The correct way to assess the academic validity of a paper is not by assessing the journal in which it was published, or by the publisher that published that journal, but by its content.<sup>4</sup> Such decisions should be made by collective academic councils, so that each case may be fairly assessed, then judged using quantitative and validated measures.<sup>4</sup>

#### 8. Conclusion

OA publishing is an exciting movement that is becoming more popular and politically supported because it aims to remove barriers to access information.<sup>5</sup> Pay to publish is not a model that only OA publishers use, in fact many subscription journals charge some form of author fee and many OA journals are funded by non profit organizations and they do not charge authors.<sup>1</sup> Pseudo journals exploit the pay-to-publish system primarily to collect publication fees in promise for rapid publication but not providing decent peer-review.<sup>1</sup> Both open-access and subscription publishing models can be abused by 'predatory' authors, editors, and journals.

Recently, there has been an increasing support for an open peer-review process that means reviews and identities of reviewers in scientific publications are disclosed and it makes it possible for others to see the quality of peer review.<sup>8</sup>

Yet, to date, no other effective strategy has been defined as to how best to reign in this unscholarly, and in some cases, fraudulent activity that is causing considerable chaos in global academia, and which is undermining the quality of science and harming authors.<sup>4</sup>

Predatory publishing activities are here to stay as long as there is a pressure to publish more. Cyber criminals are developing evermore-sophisticated techniques to entrap not only young researchers, but also experienced academics unaware of the threats focused on scholarly publishing. Scientific and scholarly publishing literacy should focus on the ability to recognize fraud and avoid pseudo publishers.<sup>11</sup> Efforts must focus on improving oversight to increase publication literacy.

#### Sources of support

None.

#### Conflict of interest

The Authors have no conflict of interest to declare.

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