Editorial

Predatory Journals: Beware on Who You Trust

High quality medical research is essential for “the attainment by all peoples of the highest possible level of health” (World Health Organization, Constitution) [1]. Research and the evidence that it yields, are critical elements for improving global health and health equity. New and improved medical knowledge is available to clinical practitioners in the form of scientific publications, traditionally in the format of printed or electronic biomedical journals. These publications should be readily available to clinicians across the globe, without financial or access barriers. Recently, two competing predatory phenomena threaten the dissemination of biomedical research, the progress of science, and the advancement of humankind.

A “predator” has been biologically defined as “an entity that pursuits, captures, and kills animals for food” or “a person or group that ruthlessly exploits others” [2]. Just as in biology, predators naturally occur in academic situations. Specifically, predator journals have become extremely common in the age of electronic publications [3].

Prior to the availability of the World Wide Web, most scholarly-published journals were print-based that required a subscription [4-6]. As such, the hallmark of academic achievement in Medicine is the publication of scholarly-written articles. In general, printed journals are limited in content, as well as their frequency by the constraints of time, page space, and adherence to standards of quality. Electronic publishing frees most of these constraints at the expense of lack of strict quality control. In print journals, stringent peer-review occurs to ensure an article’s accuracy before publication. This does not happen in many e-journals, as this would lengthen the editorial process. Peer-review is also essential to ensure authors meet the accepted high standards of their discipline and to control the dissemination of research data to ensure that unwarranted claims, unacceptable interpretations or methodologically flawed studies are not published. Despite its wide-spread use by most journals, the peer-review process has been criticized by the internet delay of the process to publish new findings and due to perceived biases by the editors and/or reviewers. The response to these criticisms and the ubiquity of the World-Wide-Web and social media has led to a recent explosion of online only, open-access electronic journals which charge publication fees. The fees for the publication of a single “report” vary from $200 to $3000 US Dollars. This pay-to-publish model, driven by deceptive publishers, has led to mass publication of many scientific articles with little or no peer-review. This poses a significant risk to real advances in scientific knowledge. The open access pay-to-publish model has been further fueled by the predatory behavior of the large, and powerful traditional publishing companies, that charge hefty subscription fees for access to the online-versions of their printed journals, making them inaccessible to clinicians at all, but the wealthiest institutions.

Despite its downfalls, there has not been a foolproof system developed yet to replace the peer-review process. However, this process requires greater transparency, greater efficiency with the elimination of conflicts of interest, financial exploitation allowing for the rapid and ready access of high-quality research reports to practitioners across the World.

As Editors of Current Respiratory Medicine Reviews, we assure that a strict quality control exists in our published papers. We highly recommend to our authors and readers that they stay away from these predatory journals that do not care about sound scientific methodology and only care about profit.

REFERENCES

Paul E. Marik  
(Associate Editor)  
Department of Internal Medicine and Division of Pulmonary and Critical Care Medicine,  
Eastern Virginia Medical School, Norfolk, Virginia, USA

Joseph Varon  
(Editor-in-Chief)  
Department of Critical Care, United General Hospital  
Houston, Texas USA  
E-mail: jvaron@roamer.net