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EDITORIAL NOTE

Publish and perish in the hands of predatory journals

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Since the publishing of Jeffrey Beall's list of possible predatory open-access journals in 2010 (Beall 2013, Butler 2013), not much changed regarding the avalanche of invitations for publications from publishers that are almost unknown by the scientific community. Beall listed more than 1,000 journals by the end of December, 2016. However, the author spontaneously removed the list in January 2017 (Silver 2017). The pressure for publication is increasing exponentially, opening a door for publishers seeking easy money and catching inexperienced authors. Some journals offer speed of publication at high costs and there have been reports of journals publishing duplicate articles (Sanderson 2010) and invited Editors resigned after such incidents.

Sometimes, the victim is not an inexperienced researcher. This year, a situation has come to our attention regarding a highly experienced Brazilian scientist (with over 50 published papers in indexed journals, over 2,000 citations, h-index >20). Names are intentionally omitted. This fellow received an invitation to contribute to a given journal with a choice of possible formats (revision, original paper, opinion, letter, etc). More specifically, the invitation referenced an upcoming issue that was in need of a short opinion manuscript and whether it would be feasible to attend to the tight schedule, by submitting this paper within the next week. The name of the journal was closely similar to other well-known and distinguished journals in the same research area. Such a characteristic – most likely intentionally – misled the fellow and his PhD student (and likely other researchers). They prepared the manuscript and, while submitting, some odd facts came to their attention, such as a poorly organized website, no reliable submission checklist and, most importantly, no fields for the referral of potential peer-reviewers. Since some journals, even with journal citation reports (JCR), also have poorly organized submission interfaces, the authors decided to proceed with the full submission procedure. This situation motivated the subsequent search for more information regarding said journal, which was promptly identified as lacking in credibility, not to mention its inclusion in the – now retrieved - Beall's list of predatory publishers (<https://clinicallibrarian.wordpress.com/2017/01/23/bealls-list-of-predatory-publishers/>). Appallingly, the following day the fellow was contacted by the journal with the acceptance of the manuscript along with an invoice due to pay over 4 times the previously informed page charges. The authors informed the 'Editor' about their decision to cancel the submission, and received a discount instead. Questioned about the surprisingly fast peer review process, the 'Editor' replied that, as an invited opinion manuscript, no peer review was applicable. No further contact was made from the publisher regarding the status of the manuscript, page charges or anything else, nor was the manuscript

published online by that journal. While anecdotal, this real story is a tale oft-repeated, reflecting modern practice in science and information, a landscape dominated by the numbers and pressure to publish.

Several highly reputable journals are by nature open access or provide the authors such opportunity (upon payment of an open access fee) (Beall 2013). Top quality journals also publish manuscripts in the format of correspondence, commentaries and perspectives that may not follow a peer-reviewed process, being evaluated and edited by a high skilled advisory board member. But this is not the case of predatory journals.

While researchers are under the pressure for publication by funding agencies and research institutions, predatory publishers find a perfect context in which they create attractive journals and websites. Besides, they provide high-throughput communication systems aimed to catch 'naïve' or even senior researchers, with promises of speed peer-review process, open access, and affordable page charges, in particular for researches of low- and middle-income countries not eligible for publication fees waivers. Editorial Boards can be easily assembled from non-established researchers or even by non-existing academics. Besides, acronyms of names from known and reputable journals are used, which may confound both the authors and the general reader, which most likely is unaware of such practices.

Strategies to avoid similar episodes may include checking the tradition and history of prospective journals both on the web and among other fellows, and carefully judging the journal's general policy concerning peer review and pre-print (Callaway and Powell 2016, Cintas 2016, Annesley et al. 2017).

The take home message is to be aware of predatory publishers and, if the offer is too tempting, carefully evaluate. Nowadays the opportunity for finding a reputable journal for publication is vast, both in number and visibility in the scientific community. Beyond publication number and metrics ultimately driving burn-out (De Meis et al. 2003), researchers should be concerned most importantly with the message of their work and its scientific quality, and how this work will gain visibility. Participation in international meetings, lecturing intramural conferences, sending reprints to fellows, participating in social media and blogs, commentaries in pre-prints and PubMed, institutional press releases, are all strategies to publicize the author's highly valuable scientific work, more important than the mere publication in any journal just to add one more paper to the academic record. As once told by Albert Einstein, when he was a young clerk in the patent office he had the 'opportunity to think about physics', since 'an academic career compels a young man to scientific production, and only strong characters can resist the temptation of superficial analysis' (Clark 2007).

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