

## Open access: is there a predator at the door?

Dear Readers,

If your inbox looks like ours, you are barraged daily with requests to send research to a new journal or to join a new editorial board. Many of these ‘invitations’ are from new open access journals, not all of which are legitimate.

Open access journals play an increasingly important role in today’s world of medical publication, and provide information which would otherwise be difficult or impossible for some to access. Openly sharing peer-reviewed information at no cost to the reader can greatly enhance the distribution of legitimate scientific and clinical data. However, there is also an increasing number of journals purporting to serve this mission but acting in a predatory fashion. Here are a few guidelines.

Hallmarks of legitimate journals include:

- A well-known editorial board of recognised experts in the field;
- An International Standard Serial Number (‘ISSN’);
- Listing in the Directory of Open Access Journals (at <https://doaj.org>);
- Publisher membership in the Open Access Scholarly Publishers Association;
- Affiliation with recognised societies;
- The journal website provides complete contact information;
- All publication fees are clearly listed and are not submission fees.

What defines a predatory journal? Moher and Moher recently summed up the characteristics neatly by suggesting that such publications can, perhaps, be characterised by their behaviour: aggressive recruitment emails, unrealistic promises regarding publication and ultimately worthless peer review.<sup>1</sup>

A number of published articles suggest the lack of an editorial review process as a key characteristic of predatory journal publications. One article described predatory journal publications as ‘gobbledegook’.<sup>2</sup> In 2005, Massachusetts Institute of Technology researchers invented software called SCIGen, which randomly combined strings of words to produce fake computer-generated science papers that were ultimately published in open access journals. This exercise was performed to show the low bar for acceptance of papers, which were meaningless, or as they put it, ‘to maximize amusement’. In 2014, Van Noorden pointed out in *Nature News* that several publishers were removing more

than 120 papers from their subscription services after it was discovered that ‘the works were computer-generated non-sense’.<sup>3</sup>

More subtle forms of non-gibberish, but also non-peer-reviewed publications, seem to be expanding rapidly. Rather than motivation of the publisher to promote the science and practice of medicine, the impetus is clearly financial. They charge large sums of money to publish articles unable to pass a rigorous editorial or peer-review process, which can be quite lucrative. Likewise, authors who may have been rejected by legitimate peer-reviewed journals may find that some open access journals offer an avenue for publication without editorial oversight. Therefore, we suggest the following guidelines when evaluating whether a journal is predatory.

Be cautious if:

- Invitations to submit research or to join editorial boards are overly flattering;
- There is a guarantee of rapid publication;
- The journal title is very similar to that of a legitimate journal, but is not an established journal;
- The journal website has no address or contact information;
- The mission of the publisher and/or the journal is described in vague terms;
- There is no mention of peer review or basic submission requirements;
- Manuscripts are submitted by email rather than through the publisher’s online manuscript peer-review system;
- There is a requirement to submit a minimum number of articles per year, and there is no clear statement that your open access publication fee will be waived.

We recommend an excellent recent editorial by Roberts, which shares our opinion, entitled ‘Predatory journals: think before you submit’.<sup>4</sup>

Our goal is to provide high-quality, rigorously peer-reviewed papers and scientific information of value to you and all of our readers.

RAKESH CHANDRA, Co-Editor-in-Chief, *American Journal of Rhinology & Allergy*

EDWARD W FISHER, Senior Editor, *The Journal of Laryngology & Otology*

TERRY M JONES, Editor-in-Chief, *Clinical Otolaryngology*

DAVID W KENNEDY, Editor-in-Chief, *International Forum of Allergy & Rhinology*

DENNIS H KRAUS, Co-Editor-in-Chief, *Journal of Neurological Surgery Part B*

JOHN H KROUSE, Editor-in-Chief, *Otolaryngology – Head & Neck Surgery*; Editor-in-Chief, *OTO Open*

MICHAEL LINK, Co-Editor-in-Chief, *Journal of Neurological Surgery Part B*

LAWRENCE R LUSTIG, Editor-in-Chief, *Otology & Neurotology*

BERT W O'MALLEY JR, Editor-in-Chief, *Journal for Oto-Rhino-Laryngology, Head and Neck Surgery*

JAY F PICCIRILLO, Editor-in-Chief, *JAMA Otolaryngology – Head & Neck Surgery*

ROBERT RUBEN, Editor-in-Chief, *International Journal of Pediatric Otorhinolaryngology*

ROBERT T SATALOFF, Editor-in-Chief, *Journal of Voice*; Editor-in-Chief, *Ear, Nose & Throat Journal*

SANDRA SCHWARTZ, *ORL – Head and Neck Nursing*

RAJ SINDWANI, Co-Editor-in-Chief, *American Journal of Rhinology & Allergy*

RICHARD J SMITH, Editor-in-Chief, *The Annals of Otology, Rhinology & Laryngology*

MICHAEL G STEWART, Editor-in-Chief, *The Laryngoscope*

PETER C WEBER, Editor-in-Chief, *American Journal of Otolaryngology*

D BRADLEY WELLING, Editor-in-Chief, *Laryngoscope Investigative Otolaryngology*

ROBIN YOUNGS, Senior Editor, *The Journal of Laryngology & Otology*

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- 3 Van Noorden R. Publishers withdraw more than 120 gibberish papers. *Nature News* 24 Feb 2014
- 4 Roberts J. Predatory journals: think before you submit. *Headache* 2016;**56**:618–21