

Issue of Open Access and Predatory Journals

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Most of us must have noted a surge of e-mails where invitation is made to submit research articles to "scholarly" journals. A fast track processing is also promised. These are open access online journals. Some of these journals are listed under the category of "predatory" journals, a terminology that indicates questionable editorial and publishing services for business purposes. The publishers of many of these journals do not have address. These journals either do not have a diverse editorial board or at times one may find names of renowned persons on the website without their consent. They lack transparency in peer review process, a must for all journals. The articles submitted to these journals are quickly accepted and then authors receive a mail demanding huge amount to be paid as publication charges. Researchers are thus deceived by such invitations. As all of these journals are open access thus a doubt is raised against online journals with regard to their credibility. It is, therefore, important to further tease out this issue.

Open access means an unrestricted access to published articles. The same can be used without any restriction. This is done under Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license. Some journals, like those by BioMed Central publishers, which is United Kingdom based for-profit publisher, provide free access to their readers.¹ In their case, authors pay for the publication / processing and thus the cost incurred upon by the publisher is taken care of. Many of these journals have impact factor assigned by Thomson Reuters. In this model author retains the copyright of their original article through a creative commons attribution licence. It ensures that there are no barriers to access the published work. Publisher does not have the copyright. Another example is that of PLOS (Public Library of Science), a non-profit organization, which brings out PLOS one journal. They have the same model of open access as that of BioMed Central. It also offers fee assistance to the authors. In order to facilitate the review process as an example, PLOS one used to ask authors to suggest reviewers' names. But due to recent complaints this offer is now withdrawn. This is to check any fraud in the peer review

process which has been reported and they have retracted one such published article. Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) guidelines are now strictly followed. PLOS one is now a high impact factor journal though there is criticism against the way processing of articles is made.²

It is of utmost importance that one must not mix-up open access journals with predatory publishers and journals. This issue surfaced when a librarian by the name of Jeffrey Beall searched the background of publishers of open access journals from whom invitation were extended to submit the research papers or become part of the editorial board. He then probed the issue and found that many of such journals and publishers were predatory.³ He himself believes in traditional method of publication and is a great critic of open access journals. He regularly monitors these open access online journals and publishes up-dated list so as to alert the researchers. These journals do not follow the scholarly peer review process. The main intent of these publishers is commercial; they are there to make money as part of their business. Many of the predatory journals are based in developing countries. India is becoming a hub of these activities. These predatory journals promise quick review and immediate online availability of the articles which attracts many novice researchers.

In this background, it is also important to find out the role of traditional publishers over the years. They have been there for decades and made huge profit from publications. They not only charge authors but also for reprint and reproduction of the published material. The copyright of published material remains with the publishers. This very policy was challenged few decades ago when internet became freely available. Free access to published articles was increasingly demanded and there was a move and pressure on the publisher to bring changes in their policy of controlled access. Directory of Open Access Journal (DOAJ) is an indexing body of open access peer reviewed journals. DOAJ was also blamed that it did not follow the policy strictly while assessing the peer review and other editorial processes of open access journals. DOAJ have now made changes in its assessment of new applicants due to which only publishers can apply for indexing with this body.

Open access journals are now also produced by giant publishers like Elsevier, Springer, Wiley etc. One must read instructions to the authors before submission so as to understand publication policies and processing charges. Many of the traditional high impact journals

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make some or all of their articles free to be accessed after some period of time and some of the articles in their latest issues can be accessed free of charge. A hybrid model is also used by subscription journals in which some of the articles are open access and others are not. There is also a move by Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation for researchers to publish in journals with an open access policy to published article. The foundation promised to pay the processing charges where it has funded the research.

Journal of College of Physicians and Surgeons Pakistan (JCPSP) which is now in 25th year of its publication has adopted a stringent peer review process after detailed in-house scrutiny of submitted articles. It has diverse editorial board with reviewers both from Pakistan and other countries. It is the youngest general medical journal from Pakistan with an impact factor. Another

unique aspect of JCPSP policy is that it does not require processing / publication charges either from the authors or institutes. The sole policy of JCPSP is to promote research and make it available to readers free of cost. JCPSP also pay token money to its worthy reviewers and greatly acknowledge their contribution in promoting quality research. It is hoped that other journals shall follow the policies of JCPSP and contribute to improved healthcare indices of global population.

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