

Another “Dear Esteemed Colleague” Journal Email Invitation?

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Recently, members of the World Association for Disaster and Emergency Medicine (WADEM) have found themselves invited to join editorial boards, to submit manuscripts, and to do peer reviews for little known “scholarly” journals. A common question that is forwarded to the *Prehospital and Disaster Medicine* (PDM) Editorial Office is, are these valid invitations and what are they about? This editorial is intended to address some of these questions and to alert PDM readers to the proliferation of non-credible (predatory) medical journal publishing.

Advancements in electronic publishing have radically changed academic publishing. The era of print publishing is rapidly fading and being replaced with online electronic publishing. Electronic publishing changes have resulted in dynamic improvements in dissemination and access to scientific information. Traditional journals such as PDM have embraced electronic publishing in addition to print publication, while newly introduced journals are most often only in electronic format. Journals that adopt the electronic distribution format avoid the cost of print and distribution operations. The cost of physically printing journal content and the constantly increasing cost of distributing printed issues will result in electronic publication being the predominate format for making medical journal content available.

While the shift to electronic publication has resulted in less cost to produce a reputable journal, there are costs that still exist because of the need for manuscript management, professional copy-editing, pagination and web posting of manuscripts, maintaining an electronic library of past publications, and day-to-day editorial office management of peer review, author inquiry, and notification. There are also fixed costs such as tax and revenue reports. To cover these costs, a journal may adopt one or a mix of financial models including subscription, publication fee, and endowment models. In the past, most established print journals supported the cost of publication by subscriptions from individuals and libraries. A few were fortunate to have foundations or endowments that were established to support publication of a journal on an ongoing basis. In the publishing model of the past, an author was not expected to pay for the cost for publication of an accepted manuscript. With the development of electronic publishing, a newer format has evolved in which an author is expected to pay part or all of the cost for publication of an accepted manuscript. While initially controversial because a journal publisher may be biased to publish any author paid manuscripts, regardless of quality of the research, the practice of expecting authors to pay for publication has become rapidly accepted. In fact, some older traditional print subscription journals have adopted a mixed subscription-author pay model to allow for costs to cover open access (discussed below) publication of content.

With electronic publication of health and medical journal content, there has been a strong movement by academics and clinicians to have the scientific literature freely available to all. Open access is the term used to describe free Internet access to a

full manuscript. Open access is an eventual goal for all credible scientific publication to allow for those who apply the science to have immediate access to the original works. A problem with open access is that it undermines the traditional subscription method of financing publication in that subscriptions are not needed to retrieve open access information. Traditional subscription journals have addressed this issue by allowing direct purchase of non-open-access articles or the licensing of libraries with institutional subscriptions to a journal to distribute non-open-access material to library users. In addition, credible subscription journals that are not open access have adopted a hybrid form of open access in which an author may self-archive, and therefore distribute, a preliminary version of an accepted manuscript rather than the final version of record which is formally published (as is accepted practice for authors submitting to PDM).

The priority placed on open access publication has resulted in development of newer journals that support publication costs by author fees and avoid the need for subscription support. Unfortunately, the movement toward open access publishing, which is solely electronic-based, has resulted in the appearance of non-credible or predatory open access publishing. Predatory open access publishing is a term coined by Jeffrey Beall of the University of Colorado (USA) who maintains an updated list of such publishers in a web site that is in the public domain and Internet available.¹ Non-credible or predatory publishing is usually open access in structure and involves charging publication fees to authors without the editorial and publishing services provided by legitimate journals. The most current list of Beall’s non-credible open access publishers lists 923 open access “scholarly” journals in the predatory category.¹ Some of the characteristics of non-credible or predatory publishing operations are accepting manuscripts with little or no peer-review, notifying authors of fees only after manuscripts are submitted, aggressively advertising to academics and society members to submit articles and serve on editorial boards, listing persons on editorial boards without their permission, fake or nonexistent impact factors, and encouraging authors to submit manuscripts that have already been published with little or no change from the original manuscript. Another interesting characteristic of non-credible journals is that journal titles will often be based on titles of well-established legitimate journals.

Unsolicited invitations to serve on editorial boards, to submit manuscripts, and to conduct peer-review for unknown journals are best ignored as is any other Internet spam. It is particularly important to avoid being associated by name (on an editorial board or as a peer-reviewer) with a non-credible journal for both liability and professional reasons.

One method for determining if a journal is credible is to determine that a journal is indexed in a database that applies rigorous evaluation before adding a journal to that database. One can expect a credible health and medical journal to be indexed in MEDLINE

	SUBSCRIPTION MODEL CREDIBLE	OPEN ACCESS CREDIBLE	OPEN ACCESS PREDATORY
1. FINANCE MODEL	Individual and Institutional Subscriptions.	Author publication fees (may be mixed model with subscription base).	Author publication fees.
2. CHARACTERISTICS			
Peer Review	Formal as defined by the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors and the Committee on Publishing Ethics (international).	Formal (may be same as for indexed subscription journals).	Informal or none.
Index	MEDLINE ² (US National Library of Medicine).	MEDLINE ² (US National Library of Medicine).	
Index	Scimago Journal and Country Rank (SJR). ⁴	Scimago Journal and Country Rank (SJR). ⁴	
Index	Web of Science. ³		
Index		Directory of Open Access Journals. ⁵	
Listing			Beall's List. ¹
3. PUBLISHER	Established, with professional web page providing instructions for authors, qualified editorial board, and focused journal objectives.	Established, with professional web page providing instructions for authors, qualified editorial board, and focused journal objectives.	Most often little known, web page with excessive advertising and editorial board that is not well credentialed or qualified in the field of publication.
4. RECRUITMENT OF MANUSCRIPTS	By an announcement within the journal for specific topics or special editions.	By an announcement within the journal for specific topics.	Spam emails common.

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Table 1. Characteristics of Health and Medical Journal Publishing Formats

(US National Library of Medicine),² The Web of Science (Thompson-Reuters),³ and Scimago Journal and Country Rank (SJR).⁴ For open-access journals, the Directory of Open Access Journals⁵ has made good effort to index legitimate open access journals. On the other hand, databases such as the PubMed⁶ series (US National Library of Medicine) and Google Scholar (Google)⁷ do not use a selective process before indexing a journal and may contain legitimate and non-credible titles. "Beall's List"¹ provides a current list of non-credible open access journals that is valuable for determining the credibility of open access publications.

Table 1 summarizes some of the aspects of the health and medical journal publishing formats that help in determining credible versus non-credible journals. The table is simplistic in that many subscription models also provide means for open access publication and many open access journals provide a print-on-demand feature for those who wish to purchase printed issues.

All are cautioned to be aware of predatory publishers and to avoid exploitation by submitting manuscripts, peer reviewing, or volunteering to serve on editorial boards of any of the many non-credible journals.

References

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