

Editorial

Taking a stand against predatory publishers

The rise of predatory publishing

There is a blight threatening nursing and midwifery research, academic credibility and the value of our scholarship, the blight of ‘predatory publishing’ (Beall 2012, Pickler *et al.* 2015, Simpson 2016). This is a more modern and more malign equivalent of the embarrassing phenomena of ‘vanity publishing’. Once, if you were convinced of your literary talents but could find no reputable publisher who shared your rosy self-assessment, you could find a vanity publisher who would print a few hundred copies of your treasured poems or great first novel, in hidebound leather, with gold lettering. At last, you were now a published author, at least in your own mind.

That may have been appropriate for some, or sad and harmless for others but there is nothing either appropriate or harmless about today’s predatory publishers. Latest estimates show that there are over 10,000 predatory journals churning out over 400,000 articles per year and netting the predators over US\$74 million (Shen & Björk 2015). Finances aside, the potential effect on scholarship and on the trustworthiness of what we consult and respect as ‘the literature’ or ‘evidence’ could be catastrophic. We risk the pollution, debasement and devaluing of what should be a credible, reliable and valuable repository of the best of nursing and midwifery research and scholarship. We also risk the very notion of academic standards and scholarly quality as these relate to the dissemination and sharing of our research and thinking.

Academic publishing’s perfect storm

Predatory publishers are taking advantage of one of society’s many ‘perfect storms’. They have discovered an almost equally perfect ‘business model’ to support their money-making scams. On the demand side, there are more and more academics, higher degree students and researchers who ‘must publish’ and establish a track record as an expectation of their role or even as a condition of their employment. As the ‘publish or perish’ ethos has extended

beyond academia, there are now more clinicians, managers and other health professionals who also wish to see their work published and widely shared.

The problem is that having your work published in a quality journal is not easy. Writing and thinking are hard work and take time – weeks if not months. After submission, the reviews of your paper may take several more months. After that, your paper may be rejected, or any suggested revisions may take a few more months. Even after acceptance of your paper, publication may take many more months, even ‘online’. In our current age of instant access and gratification, the threats to such a slow, even seemingly complacent ‘model’ are not surprising.

Enter the predators

Imagine as a would-be author that you could find an open access publisher online who has a reputable international journal, with an impact factor, an impressive title and an even more impressive looking editorial board, who will guarantee peer review of your paper in a few days and publication a few days after the near-inevitable ‘acceptance’? Even better, your paper will be openly available to everyone online just as quickly. (There is the small matter of the ‘publication processing fee’, but we won’t mention that until your paper is ‘accepted’). It is a seemingly perfect solution to the ‘problems’ of getting published.

The old adage was never more apt. ‘If something looks too good to be true, it probably is’. These ‘open-access’ predatory publishers are a highly organized, very sophisticated scam industry whose sole purpose has nothing to do with ‘improving scholarship’ or ‘opening up’ research. The only thing that they are interested in opening up is your purse or wallet and the only ‘access’ they care about is to your credit card. (Dadkhah 2015).

Predatory publishers operate within a web of lies, fraud and deception. They are the publishing equivalent of a distant Prince’s email asking to borrow your bank details to ‘share’ a few million dollars with you. Their scams and unethical practices are a legion; they market almost entirely by industrial-scale spamming of our email boxes, they impersonate or ‘hijack’ genuine journals (Beall 2013,

Dadkhah 2015) create fake journals and websites, have little or no transparency about their 'fees', 'copy and paste' editorial boards by lifting academics' profiles from their university home pages, invent bogus 'impact factors' for their equally bogus journals, promise 'peer review' that is as genuine as showing your paper to the office cat, invent fake 'academic societies' and professional associations who then host spurious 'conferences' with ectoplasmic 'conference proceedings', publish work that is little better than computer-generated gibberish (Labbé 2010, Bohannon 2013, Van Noorden 2014) and so on and on.

Like many other professional scammers, predatory publishers are not stupid people and their predatory journals, conferences and invitation tactics are often very sophisticated operations. Checking the papers in some of the predatory journals will show that some respected academics, researchers and even noted nursing professors have published with them. That they specifically target more junior and inexperienced researchers and academics in developing countries makes them even more contemptible (Clark & Smith 2015).

Beall's List and the fightback

The good news is that there is a way to recognize and combat the predators. Thanks to the work of Colorado librarian, Jeffrey Beall, we now have 'Beall's List', <https://scholarlyoa.com/publishers/> an extensive name and shame list of predatory publishers and their dodgy 'journals' and 'conferences'. The list is updated regularly and the scholarly community adds their own updates and information about the predators and their latest activities. Legitimate nursing journals have also helped in the fight by creating INANE's Directory of Nursing Journals <http://nursingeditors.com/journals-directory/> which lists legitimate, vetted and reputable journals. Legitimate Open Access (OA) publishers have done the same through the creation of the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ) <https://doaj.org>. While Beall's List has its critics in the Open Access Publishing and Library worlds, it remains the best resource available at the moment for nurses, midwives and researchers who want to avoid the ignominy of publishing with a predator. These are the three default checks that every nurse or midwife must now make before deciding on where to publish and crucially, where NOT to publish.

Taking a leadership stand globally against the predators

These are invaluable resources in the fight against predatory publishers but more can and must be done. This is a matter

of academic integrity for every university and School of Nursing & Midwifery and clear leadership with policy action is needed to help cut off the supply of papers going to predatory publishers. In short, our schools and universities need to adopt approaches that would make it completely counterproductive and a waste of time and energy for anyone to even consider sending their work to a predatory publisher.

Every School's Research and/or Academic Standards Committee, should initiate the following policies governing predatory publishing:

- 1 In Australia, strong preference is given to publishing in journals listed by the Australian Research Council's 'Excellence in Research Australia' see <http://www.arc.gov.au/era-2015> and http://www.arc.gov.au/sites/default/files/filedepot/Public/ERA/ERA%202015/ERA2015_Submitted_Journal_ListV2.xlsx. There will be similar international equivalents.
- 2 Our strong preference is to publish in journals that are ranked in quartiles one and two by the SCImago Journal & Country Rank, see <http://www.scimagojr.com/index.php>
- 3 Staff and students will be expected to conduct 'due diligence' checks before submitting papers that include checking potential journals for legitimacy against Beall's List and the INANE/DOAJ databases. This is now a key element of the research, writing and publishing process.
- 4 A simple 'statutory declaration' will be included in any documentation involved in submitting publications or other scholarly outcomes, where the author confirms that 'This work does not appear in any journal or publication identified in the current 'Beall's List' of predatory publishers or journals'.
- 5 Any work appearing with predatory publishers, journals or conferences as identified in 'Beall's List' will not be acknowledged or counted for any purpose within the school. This means that they will not be considered for any research assessment exercise, promotion, tenure, scholarship awards, workload assessment, academic performance or any other purpose for which the school uses legitimate scholarly output.
- 6 No school funds will fund predators. All applications for conference or publishing support will require the applicant to confirm that they have checked carefully to ensure that the particular conference or journal publication fee is legitimate and not predatory. Applications will be checked and no school funds will be awarded where these are believed to be payments to predatory publishers.
- 7 Supervisors and higher degree students will be expected to ensure that all references and literature cited in theses and

other academic works do not include publications from identified predatory journals and conferences. Where it is deemed essential that such work is cited, the predatory publication status of the source will be clearly identified.

8 Staff should not provide legitimacy to predators by accepting any 'editorial board' or 'conference organising' positions from predatory publishers. Where staff have been added to such positions without their knowledge, they should attempt to withdraw from such roles and make it publicly clear that their names have been used without their consent.

At Monash Nursing & Midwifery, we have taken a two-pronged approach that makes awareness and avoidance of predatory publishers a dual responsibility of both the School and of each faculty member and student. The School has taken a clear policy stand against the predators and will incorporate information and awareness education about predatory publishers in various orientation events and information avenues for staff and students. This is not just a matter of one school's policy. It is a call to arms to nursing and midwifery academia worldwide to take a strong leadership stand in helping stamp out this scourge. We have taken a lead at Monash. Will you join us?

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