

Predatory journals: when business trumps research ethics

Revistas depredadoras: cuando el negocio supera a la ética de la investigación

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Surely many of our authors have received invitations to publish their research articles in journals and publishers whose names they have never heard before. At first, the invitation may sound very tempting, and it might even include a conference or meeting in some exotic location around the world. It's also possible that we receive invitations to republish an article from our field - otorhinolaryngology - at a meeting focused on a completely different discipline, with compliments about the originality and interest of our research. In the face of such invitations, it is highly likely that we are dealing with a predatory journal or a fake conference, whose goal is to gather as many publications and/or contributions as possible without regard for the quality of the publication, discipline, or specialty, and that often lack a legitimate peer review process (or have one of questionable quality). Additionally, the high fees charged for publication and/or attending the conference stand out, allowing the publisher or conference organizers to make significant profits. This is an example of the predatory journal model or fake conferences, where everything revolves around profit, with dubious quality at the expense of the time and money of researchers.

In recent years, predatory journals have proliferated in various fields of knowledge, including otorhinolaryngology¹. This has led to the emergence of lists identifying such journals, such as Beall's list, which serve as warnings or guides for authors deciding where to submit their work. However, the issue of predatory journals is not straightforward and cannot

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simply be categorized in black and white on long lists. Additionally, these lists are imperfect and often criticized, as they frequently use discretionary or unclear criteria. For example, Beall's list has not been updated since 2017, which has led to a gradual decline in its usage².

On the other hand, traditional publishers typically operate on a pay-per-view model for accessing articles. This business model relies on subscription payments from institutions or individuals who wish to read the articles. However, these publishers utilize the expertise of editors and reviewers to conduct the peer review process without compensating academics or researchers for their services. Many of us have worked for free for these publishers, contributing to this flawed model that cannot be praised either.

There is a third model called Open Access Diamond, which allows for the funding of scientific journals where societies, universities, or other nonprofit institutions support high-quality publications or conferences. In this model, the articles published incur no costs for the authors or the readers, ensuring that reviewers can "donate" their expert work in alignment with the journal's principles.

The problem is not only with publishers, but also includes the issue of false or fabricated articles. Such articles are more likely to be published in journals that do not have a clear, transparent evaluation process and are focused on economic gain. This is harmful to science and to scientists³. Readers of medical journals expect that articles undergo thorough review and evaluation, ensuring that the information

is accurate, reliable, and relevant to clinical practice. In contrast, those accessing articles from predatory journals do not have this assurance. These misleading publications often disseminate weak research, which can negatively impact both clinical care and ongoing research efforts⁴. Another topic intrinsically linked to this problem is the peer review process. With the increase in new journals and manuscript submissions, reviewer fatigue has emerged. Reviewers may feel overwhelmed by the excessive invitations to evaluate manuscripts. Peer review should be viewed as an opportunity to enhance the quality of global science, prioritizing the advancement of knowledge over individual interests or personal benefits⁵.

Certainly, as specialists in clinical, basic, or translational research, we must uphold good practices in our work by seeking publication in peer-reviewed journals. We should embrace constructive criticism from reviewers and sometimes understand that the quality of our work may not be sufficient for publication, requiring a complete reformulation or even rejection. This process is normal in peer review and is essential to ensuring the quality of our articles. In this context, it is important to convey to our authors and readers that our journal has a rigorous selection and peer review process. We do not operate under a pay-to-publish model; rather, we are funded by the Chilean Society of Otorhinolaryngology and Head and

Neck Surgery (SOCHIORL) through an Open Access Diamond model. Our mission as a journal is to contribute to the dissemination of scientific knowledge in our field, maintaining a commitment to academic rigor and the free accessibility of knowledge.

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