

Predatory Publishing: What Authors, Reviewers, and Editors Need to Know

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The expansion of the Internet and the increasing pressure to provide new scientific content to the public as quickly as possible have led to rapid changes in the publishing industry. Recently, new publishing models have arisen, such as open access (content available to readers at no charge), hybrid (some combination of print and online content delivery), and early online access to print journal content. At *BRN*, we have adopted facets of all three of these models over the last few years by providing a fee-based open-access option to authors of already-accepted manuscripts, publishing some supplementary material online to allow authors to present more content, and publishing all manuscripts online ahead of print publication. As with all innovations, there are benefits and drawbacks to all of these, and the models continue to evolve.

In this editorial, I will focus on one of the most controversial of the new models, open-access publishing. A relatively recent development, open-access publishing is designed to remove barriers, primarily financial, to the online access of peer-reviewed scholarly research. As it has taken hold, the open-access movement has significantly altered the conventional financial model of many journals. While journal owners historically relied entirely on journal subscriptions and content licenses or advertisements as their revenue base, most open-access publishing options are fee based, meaning the author pays a fee to have an article published and made available to readers free of charge.

The open-access model has been adopted, in some form, by many mainstream publishers such as Sage Publications, for example, the publisher of *BRN*. However, the availability of this new business model, along with the ease of entry into the field of digital publishing, has led to the launching of myriad new journals, each actively competing for authors and revenue. Some of these new journals, including those introduced by conventional commercial and professional society publishers to augment their journal portfolios, apply the rigorous peer-review practices and standards of scholarly excellence consistent with advances in professional disciplines such as nursing. However, across every academic field, professional discipline, and geographic jurisdiction, we are also seeing the emergence of a new species of publisher whose practices reveal little evidence of editorial or publishing quality. Instead, with profit as the driving force, these “predatory” publishers engage in a range of disturbingly unethical and unscholarly practices.

Predatory Motivations and Practices

When the driving motivation of a journal is profit, the focus is fixed on increasing the journal’s attractiveness for the primary source of revenue, which, in the case of open-access publishing, is the author. Typical practices of predatory publishers include promises of rapid review and acceptance, minimal to nonexistent review processes, fabricated editorial boards, and mimicry of legitimate journal titles. These publishers often send out flattering individualized e-mail solicitations to potential authors inviting them to submit manuscripts or serve as “guest editors” for their journals. Guest editing typically involves the “editors” inviting their own collaborators and colleagues to submit papers for a special issue for a fee. Conversely, the named “journal editor” may be someone with no qualifications or credibility in the field and may simultaneously administer a suite of journals in a wide range of fields in an effort to attract as many submissions from author-customers as possible. In the rush to provide rapid review and acceptance for publication, these editors may review submissions single-handedly or rely on a single employee “peer” to bless a manuscript and deem it publishable. This practice is sometimes evident in the published document, with the dates of submission, review, and acceptance all occurring in close proximity to one another.

Many predatory publishers also deploy unscrupulous marketing practices to seduce unsuspecting potential authors, such as inventing journal titles that are similar to those of well-known and reputable journals or using logos deceptively designed to call to mind those of conventional publishing houses. Operating within the global environment, these journals tend to establish administrative home bases that afford protection from legal repercussions from the charges of copyright violation that could arise from these practices. The goal of such creative strategies is always the appearance of credibility, thereby increasing the appeal of these journals for the unwary author.

Predatory publishers often target senior scholars to build the journal’s credibility and help attract unsuspecting or naive

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Table 1. Guidelines for Evaluating the Integrity of a Journal.

Question	What to look for	Red flags
Who is the editor in charge of journal content?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A person who has a reputation in the discipline • Direct contact information for the editor is provided 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You cannot find any evidence of the editor's standing in the discipline • There is no contact information provided for the editor
What is the journal's process for assuring quality of content?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A clear description of the process for review of manuscripts prior to publication is stated • The names and duties of the editorial, advisory, or review panel members are listed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A promise of rapid review and publication (quality reviews take time) • Mystification of those who are involved in the review process
Does the journal have sound business and publishing practices?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The journal and its publisher are members of the COPE • The journal is in the INANE/NA&E Directory of Nursing Journals • If the journal shows an impact factor, it is verifiable in the Journal Citation Reports (Web of Science) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The publisher/journal is on Beall's list of predatory publishers at Scholarly Open Access • The journal name or other information is suspiciously like that of another, established journal • The journal/publisher solicits manuscript using excessively complimentary e-mails
Are there author processing charges?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information about APC, if any, is clear and easily accessible 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information about processing charges is not readily accessible or is unclear
Is the journal associated with a professional organization?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Association with a known professional organization is clearly stated 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The association, if any, is completely unknown to you
Is the journal produced by a long-standing publisher of scientific literature?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The name of the publisher is well known. The publisher produces other journals that you respect 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You have never heard of the publisher and are not familiar with the journals they publish

Note. INANE = International Academy of Nursing Editor; NA&E = Nurse Author & Editor; COPE = Committee on Publication Ethics; APC = author processing charges.

authors, who may fall prey to flattery. Other targets include those who may allow the academic pressure to publish, blinding them to the questionable practices that allow a journal to bring a manuscript to print in record time. Unfortunately, aspiring authors caught up in the promise of rapid publication may unwittingly find that (a) their career progress is negatively affected by the lack of credibility of their selected publishing venues, (b) they are subject to unexpected additional fees once their paper has been published, or (c) their previously published articles suddenly cease to exist, become inaccessible through established search mechanisms or reside in legal limbo, with the copyright signed away to a nonexistent publisher and their contractual arrangements unenforceable.

We have come to trust the practices and processes of our various scholarly and professional publications for maintaining the quality and credibility of the corpus of disciplinary knowledge. However, the new and unmanaged proliferation of pseudo-scholarly activity could flood the market with journals and articles that discredit a profession. In health care, this threat is even more serious, as the pseudo-science and poor scholarship published by predatory journals could conceivably result in harm to patients and the information-seeking public.

The International Academy of Nursing Editors' (INANE) Call to Action

The INANE community, representing editors of credible and reputable nursing journals, believes that it is imperative to inform nurses of the harm inherent in this new hazard. We

encourage nursing authors to consult Jeffrey Beall's list of potential, possible, or probable predatory scholarly open-access publishers at Scholarly Open Access as a reliable resource of journals to avoid. His approaches and methods for compiling the list, including dynamic monitoring of the publishing world and a willingness to reconsider and revise any listing found to be in error or misleading, make Beall's site extremely helpful for nurses who now need to ensure the credibility of the journals to which they entrust their manuscripts or with which they become otherwise involved. At the same time, Beall would be the first to acknowledge the impossibility of keeping up with all of the emerging new journals. We therefore also encourage potential authors to consult the Directory of Nursing Journals, a collaborative effort between INANE and *Nurse Author & Editor*, for journals that have been reviewed and vetted within our community and to be vigilant for the hallmarks of predatory practices. A third useful resource is Thomas Long's blog Nursing Writing, which includes a compilation of recent reports on predatory open-access journals and scholarly conference scams. Another potentially useful resource may be the Directory of Open Access Journals, which is working to strengthen its approvals process using stricter criteria. INANE will also maintain information on this topic at its website as an ongoing reference for members. These sources will undoubtedly continue to evolve over time. Finally, we offer in the accompanying table (see Table 1), a brief compilation of questions authors should consider when selecting a journal for manuscript submission summarized from internationally reputable organizations concerned with publications ethics.

In writing this statement, the INANE community hopes to encourage educators, mentors, scholars, and clinical practitioners to join in a campaign to help our colleagues understand emerging hazards on the path to publication. We encourage those who oversee institutional promotion and advancement processes to ensure that (a) their members are well mentored with respect to publication venues and (b) their review committees have the knowledge required for fair assessment of work across the spectrum of publication modalities. Above all, we seek to promote the emerging science, knowledge sharing, and authorial careers of our discipline by ensuring that nurses are making wise publishing choices.

INANE members are committed to sustaining the high standards we have come to expect in the published body of nursing knowledge, as we embrace the new possibilities for publishing in the digital universe. Open access is both an exciting opportunity and an intriguingly disruptive force in the publishing world. It is unfortunate that it has been exploited in this predatory manner. However, by translating our best nursing health promotion and disease prevention wisdom to the publishing domain, we can help keep our colleagues and their important ideas safe from harm.

Author's Note

This editorial has been adapted, with permission, from "Predatory Publishing: What Editors Need to Know," written by the International Academy of Nursing Editors (INANE) Predatory Publishing Collaborative and published in the September 2014 issue of *Nurse Author & Editor*.

Sources and Useful Websites

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