

## ✧ EDITORIAL ✧

# *Predatory open access journals: Avoiding profiteers, wasted effort and fraud*

The Internet has vastly improved the work of nursing scholars with ready access to digital libraries and computer tools like word processing, spell check and reference management software. Another outcome of higher productivity among scholars has been an increase in the number of journals. Many new journals are digital publications (i.e. never printed), and some do not require a subscription or payment to read them. These Internet only publications are referred to as *open access* (OA) journals because they are typically available to anyone for free. In spite of these advances, there are dangers lurking in OA publishing. In fact, some OA journals that are marketed to nursing scholars may not be a legitimate journal at all.

Internet crime has entered the academic arena by making offers that sound *too good to be true*—because they are not. Scammers will advertise ‘journals’ that can offer almost immediate publishing dates and do not require a genuine review process—for a price. All they really require is payment of a substantial fee by the author. Yes, there are many OA journals that are soliciting papers, and the review process is now much shorter than in years past. But these criminals are targeting novice scholars, researchers who are writing in a second language and busy faculty everywhere. Although there are reputable OA journals that require fees for submitting manuscripts, there are many that are just profiteers.

To make themselves look legitimate, online criminals may fabricate a fancy webpage for their new OA publication and send out thousands of emails to unsuspecting faculty members who want and need to publish (that includes all of us). These criminals may even show some articles posted in a format resembling legitimate OA journals. In some cases, papers may actually appear online (for a short time), but they may not turn up in library data bases, or on sites like Google Scholar, because they are not indexed in any way. That is, indexing involves a rigorous review process and cannot be undertaken by journals with a limited history of publishing. Ultimately, the published works disappear into the electronic darkness of deleted websites and never

seen again.<sup>1</sup> This can occur regardless of the quality of the work actually submitted.

But OA publishing scammers have diversified their approaches to scam unsuspecting scholars by creating sham journals with names that sound a lot like well-respected journals. The scammers send out email invitations to academics everywhere, and both experienced and novice scholars are often flattered by being courted by a good journal.<sup>2</sup> The invitation may also ask the faculty member to recruit colleagues to prepare a special edition for the sham journal. The publisher promises a quick publication date with assurance that all writers obtain the benefit of a good impact score. All the publisher actually wants though is a payment for each paper in the issue; the benefits are empty promises. The result is much hard work on the part of busy faculty members without the benefit of a good peer review and a publication in bona fide academic journal with a genuine impact score.

As a result, earnest scholars want to know how avoid the clever traps set by unscrupulous OA publishers. This is important because not all OA journals are fraudulent or predatory. The International Academy of Nursing Editors (INANE), in collaboration with the OA journal *Nurse Author & Editor*, developed a position statement entitled ‘Predatory Publishing: What Editors Need to Know’.<sup>3</sup> Although there are many clues to identifying these publishers, INANE collaborators offer a structured approach to appraise journals and journal websites (Table 1). Using this framework, authors can screen invitations from journals and from colleagues who have received similar invitations.

Where can nursing scholars identify credible journals to submit their manuscripts? Fortunately, there are several sources that can help screen journal invitations and to identify trustworthy journals. Nolfi<sup>4</sup> identified several websites and sources of credible journal listings (Table 2); each one has a screening protocol for adding journals to the list. If you can’t find a journal listing there, then beware.

**Table 1** Guidelines for evaluating the integrity of a journal<sup>3†</sup>

Questions	What to look for	Red flags
Who is the editor in charge of journal content?	A person who has a reputation in the discipline Direct contact information for the editor is provided	You cannot find any evidence of the editor's standing in the discipline There is no contact information
What is the journal's process for ensuring quality of content?	A clear description of the process for review of manuscripts prior to publication is stated The names and duties of editorial advisory or review panel members are listed	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?	The journal is a member of COPE The journal is in the INANE/NA & E Directory of Nursing Journals Information about author processing charges, if any, is clear and easily accessible If the journal shows an impact factor, it is verifiable in the Journal Citation Reports (Web of Science)	The publisher/journal is on Beall's list at Scholarly OA The journal's name or other information is suspiciously like another journal The journal/publisher solicits manuscripts using excessively complimentary e-mails

<sup>†</sup>Used with permission.

From Open Access Scholarly Publishers Association (OASPA) Code of Conduct (<http://oaspa.org/membership/code-of-conduct/>).

Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) Membership (<http://publicationethics.org/members>).

International Association of Scientific, Technical & Medical Publishers (STM) Code of Conduct (<http://www.stm-assoc.org/membership/code-of-conduct/>).

COPE, Committee on Publication Ethics; INANE, International Academy of Nursing Editors; OA, Open Access.

As nursing scholarship has changed with innovations in technology and Internet publishing, it is critical that we become alert to hazards arising from these same advances. For those who are interested, there is more to this story than finding a reliable journal to send a manuscript. Jeffry Beale, an academic librarian, hosts the website Scholarly Open Access (<http://scholarlyoa.com>) that is dedicated to analysis of scholarly OA publishing. This is an interesting website that offers an ongoing discussion of challenges in

**Table 2** Where to find credible journals for your manuscripts

Directory of Nursing Journals	<a href="http://nursingeditors.com/journals-directory/">http://nursingeditors.com/journals-directory/</a>
Directory of Open Access Journals	<a href="http://doaj.org/">http://doaj.org/</a>
SCImago Journal & Country Rank	<a href="http://www.scimagojr.com/">http://www.scimagojr.com/</a>
Journal Citation Reports	Found in Web of Science

academic publishing. Beale's website includes two frequently updated lists: one of questionable publishers and one of questionable, standalone journals.

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- 3 INANE Predatory Publishing Practices Collaborative. Predatory publishing: What editors need to know. *Nurse Author & Editor* 2014; **24**: 2. Available from: <http://naepub.com/predatory-publishing/2014-24-3-2/>. Accessed 10 January 2016.
- 4 Nolfi DA, Lockhart JS, Myers CR. Predatory publishing: What you don't know can hurt you. *Nurse Educator* 2015; **40**: 217–219.