

Predatory Journals: What are they?



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In last 10 years our lives have been rattled by the full force arrival of web 2.0. Every aspect of our lives is been touched and changed. And as with every change, there are positive aspects as well as negative aspects of it. In the social sphere we are well aware of the positives and negatives. Instant connectivity and sharing of thoughts and ideas has been used in various ways. The Orthopaedic Research Group has used the connectivity to bring together thousands of orthopaedic surgeons who can freely interact among each other and discuss academia [1]. The online boom has also affected research and publication scenario and one of the best examples of this is our own Journal of Orthopaedic Case Reports (JOCR). I would like you to know that JOCR had no technical person behind it when it was started. We made our own webpage and we designed our own website. The manuscript software took many months to understand and implement, but then we could implement it and use it with success. The point I am trying to make is that when we started in 2011, it was possible, although difficult, for a non-technical team to start a journal. This is even easier today and that has led to rapid sprouting of online journals. This fast growth in number of journals again has both its advantages and disadvantages. Earlier only select publishers had the expertise of starting a journal. This monopoly was broken by the online publishers who could now start journals independently. However this also led to growth of a new kind of academic fraud named "predatory Journal". The name predatory journals is coined by Jeffrey Beall a librarian from University of Denver, Colorado [2]. I would recommend all our readers to go through his website www.scholarlyoa.com. I am sure a lot many of us are getting regular emails and invitations from many journals. These journals will claim to be indexed, will have an ISSN number and will also claim to have an impact factor (not a Thomas Reuter impact). The letter would state rapid review and promise to publish fast. The problem with these journals is that they lack any organised editorial process and are mainly focussed on the article processing fees. This allows a lot of inferior scientific material to be published. Also these journals are rarely indexed with standard indexing bodies and thus do not show up in an online search, making the article as good as non-existent. Another aspect is non-archiving of the articles externally, so if the journal website goes offline all the articles are effectively lost and never published. There are many more factors that constitute a 'Predatory Journal' and I would recommend reading few of these articles [3,4,5]. The problem is real and present [6]. Some argue that the predatory journal movement is more pro-for-profit publishers although there are always shades of grey to everything [7] and this should not deter us from recognising the dangers that predatory journals pose. Until few years the predatory journals were predominated by mostly Chinese authors, but recent years have seen more and more papers from India. This may be due to changes in policies of our medical governing bodies that have now stated that number of publications are now major part of promotions in jobs. This was a double edged decision, although it seemed to try and promote research and publication in the country, it did not provide any infrastructure or training for the same. The clinicians, who had never ever published an article in a journal, were expected to learn about research and publishing in a day and then start publishing article in journals. This led to a widespread malpractices, like plagiarism, fake data, fake papers and fake journals were also a by-product of the same 'research pressure' scenario that was build up in the country. Our governing bodies are themselves not clear about criteria's of research, indexed journals and utterly fail to judge and evaluate individual research. They possibly are simply laying down (constantly changing) criteria's to enable (or disable) ticking off a square box in the promotion form. I do believe this will change over a period of time but then meanwhile it would be best to keep ourselves informed. I would request all our academicians to please check the journal credentials before submitting an article. Remember that soon these journals will be enlisted and publication in these journals will bring more negative points to your resume than positive [8].

Journal of Orthopaedic Case Reports has followed the open access model and we do charge an article processing fees. As an independent and self-funding body we need to rely on our authors to support the journal. Our founding body, the Indian Orthopaedic Research Group (IORG), provides us partial financial support that helps us keep our processing charges to minimum. We have now formalised this relationship with IORG and have established the ResearchOne Publishing house which will be launching more journals on the principles similar to JOCR (open access and clinically relevant). Open access is specifically relevant to our country and many other developing countries where the universities and libraries rarely have subscriptions to paid journals. We sincerely thank all our authors to understand our stand and to contribute to JOCR and help it remain open access. Although JOCR is open access, we have a robust editorial and review process and have clear guidelines about our policies. We have established JOCR in the open access community with registration in directory of open access journals (DOAJ) and other indexes. We have already been accepted in Pubmed (PMC forthcoming) and our articles should be visible on pubmed in due time. With this we now have additional responsibility of improving the quality of our articles and standard of review. We urge our reviewers to be more stringent in their reviews and our authors to put forth their most relevant clinical experiences. We urge our readers to be more vigilant and point us any flaws or shortcoming in any article that is published in JOCR. Our aim is to build together a journal that focusses on the patient and clinically relevant articles. We believe the purpose of every medical journal is to improve patient care and not simply publish articles and all our forthcoming journals from ResearchOne. Principally we believe that all research should be free and should be available to clinicians who can then employ it to provide better treatment for their patients.

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