

Predatory journals and how to avoid becoming a victim of one...

Predatory journals are journals that do not serve any purpose beyond making money for the publishers – they do not advance science or clinical care but prey upon people by taking both their money and their effort. The typical predatory scam begins with an unsolicited email request asking if the recipient would consider authoring a paper (usually a review or other such work) for inclusion in their journal. Sometimes such requests are laughable when they come from journals that are clearly outside of the recipient’s realm of expertise (e.g. The Journal of Materials Science), but more often the solicitation will seem plausible and may even cite a previous reference that the recipient has published legitimately (“We recently saw your excellent review of X”). It is therefore important to consider such solicitations very carefully and with scrutiny – you do not want to become a victim of one of these journals as they not only waste your time and money, but do nothing to advance your career and may even harm the impact of your CV by their inclusion. It should also be noted that you may be solicited to be on the editorial board of predatory journals – although there may not be the same financial angle, the journal hope to add to their appearance of legitimacy this way. This is also a waste of time.

How does one determine if a solicitation is from a predatory journal? Here is a simple check list of steps to take in assessing the legitimacy of any query you receive:

- 1) Is the journal on [the predatory journal list](#)?
 - a. To check, go to [Scholarly Open Access](#) and scroll down the list to see if the journal is on it.
 - b. If the journal is on the list, there is reason to believe it is predatory (see criteria [here](#)).
- 2) Is the journal listed in [PubMed](#)?
 - a. To check, go to PubMed and enter the journal name followed by “[journal]” in the search box, e.g. “new england journal of medicine[journal]”
 - b. If the journal is not included in PubMed, it’s either brand new (which is often a bad sign in its own right) or it may be a predatory journal.
 - c. N.B. Just because it’s listed in PubMed doesn’t mean it’s not a predatory journal!
- 3) What is the journal’s [Impact Factor](#)?
 - a. To check, go to [InCites](#) (or [SciJournal.org](#) if not at UVM) and enter the journal name in the search box.
 - b. Although a standard threshold for Impact Factor (IF) does not exist, biomedical journals without an IF or with an IF < 1.0 are generally not considered academically relevant (i.e. avoid them).
- 4) What is the publication charge and will they waive it?
 - a. Predatory journals operate by using the otherwise legitimate ‘open access’ model of charging fees to authors prior to publication, which can total thousands of dollars.
 - b. Although legitimate journals may also require such fees (and often charge just as much if not more), such journals will most often waive these fees if they are soliciting a submission.
 - c. It is a good idea to query the editor to see how they respond to a request to waive publication fees – most predatory journals won’t even reply to such queries and you have your answer!

Although this check list will help to identify predatory journals, it is not fool-proof – and the predatory journals are adapting to avoid detection by, for instance, using ‘zombie journals’ or journals which used to be reputable but have since failed and are now being resurrected by predators taking advantage of the journal’s previous IF and PubMed listings! It is also worth noting that predatory conferences exist as well – typically soliciting from overseas but more recently in the US as well. These conferences are similar to predatory journals, and although more difficult to detect these should can be avoided with proper due diligence.

It is always a good idea to ask a mentor, senior faculty member, or even a medical librarian about journal solicitations before embarking on any kind of effort. Remember that if something seems too good to be true...