Stopping Predatory Journals Takes Teamwork

By Julianna LeMieux — December 19, 2017

Recently we wrote a how-to guide, of sorts, to identify if a scientific paper has been published in a legitimate scientific journal or a so-called predatory journal. A team of researchers did an analysis and came up with a guide - a list of 13 signs to help spot whether a journal publishes peer-reviewed research or something else (crap). You can find the article here [2].

Predatory journals have been called a “corruption of the communication of science.” Because the mission at ACSH is to improve the communication of science, we want to be part of the movement to stop it.

A team of researchers from Ottawa, Canada, is leading the way in this movement by gathering and publishing data on predatory journals. Their idea is that, if we can understand them, maybe we can stop them. Their recent work, which focuses on steps that can be taken to stop predatory journals, is published in Nature Human Behavior [3].

In their article, they state, "Predatory journals are now undeniably everyone’s problem and studies published in these largely non-indexed, non-archived journals that lack both transparency and scientific rigour represents a colossal waste of scarce human, animal and financial resources."

They state that it is not just scientists that will need to work to stop the predatory journals, but, a coordinated effort with all of the “stakeholders” in this issue, including researchers, institutions, funders, regulators and patients.

They have outlined somewhat concrete steps that can be taken to combat these journals that, like cockroaches, seem to be infiltrating and multiplying at an astonishing pace.

For researchers, they suggest educating themselves on how to identify predatory journals and
avoid submitting work to these unscrupulous outlets. Scientists need to know that work published in predatory journals is unlikely to be indexed or disseminated in a consistent manner.

Research institutions need to not only explicitly state that the institution does not support publication in predatory journals, but, also needs to provide support for their researchers. This can be modeled after The Ottawa Hospital where there is a position called the “publications officer” who not only conducts educational seminars, but, is also available for personal consulting.

Funding agencies need to monitor and enforce policies on publication standards of the research they are funding, discourage further submissions to predatory journals.

Legitimate journals need to make it more clear that they are not predatory journals by becoming more transparent.

Patients and the public need to draw attention to this matter. Ways to do this could be to join a patient advocacy group, through social media or by communicating with local government officials.

Hopefully, with some of these concrete steps in place, the lure to publish in predatory journals will dissipate, and the body of scientific literature will become stronger.

Source [4]: Manoj Mathew Lalu. How stakeholders can respond to the rise of predatory journals. *Nature Human Behaviour* 1, 852–855 (2017) doi:10.1038/s41562-017-0257-4