



EDITORIAL

Predatory and scam journals[☆]

Revistas predatoras y estafadoras



For some years now, and empowered by digitalisation and open access publication, a large number of falsely named scientific journals have appeared whose aim it is to take advantage of scientists' need to progress in their academic and hospital careers through "publish or perish".^{1–3} Based on several digital platforms, these journals, which have been called predatory and which we could call scam journals, facilitate the whole process of publication in a journal with a suggestive and appealing title which usually imitates that of a serious and consolidated journal to which they usually add an ending such as *and research*, *and clinical* or a beginning such as *American*, *British*, *International*, *etc...* They state that the text sent will be submitted to perceptive peer-review, which is actually nonexistent, in exchange for a payment to publish. Most of these journals ensure they are indexed in a ranking which differs from the renowned WOS, JCR or Scopus ones. The medical field is the one with the highest number of scam journals.⁴ A 2016 list includes over a thousand predatory open access publishers. Some of them have been able to penetrate into Google Scholar. In the field of orthopaedic and trauma surgery in 2018, 225 possibly predatory journals from a total of 104 publishers were identified.⁵

It was Jeffrey Beall who coined the term *Predatory Journals*⁶

and created the list in 2008 with his name some years prior to retiring as a librarian at the University of Colorado.^{6,7} Recently, in March 2021 he gave a conference at the University of La Rioja, which is highly recommendable for anyone who wishes to extend their knowledge of the so-called predatory journals.^{8,9} As Beall says, these journals "deceive their authors. Many think that the publisher is legitimate. And their clientele is expanding; there are millions of academics who need to publish articles to advance in their university posts. The predatory journals exploit the model of open access in a highly unprofessional manner to

their own benefit. They take advantage of the "need to publish to progress" and also of their authors, who require payment in exchange for publishing their articles. They use spam to attract researchers, who are the real publishers' customers, not the readers. Beall provided some of the keys for recognizing these journals, which imitate the appearance of standard scientific publications and take payments even though researchers warn of the scam and decide to withdraw from the publication of their investigation. Some of the signs that may indicate that this is a predatory journal is that the articles are published almost immediately, without time for any critical review; they provide a suspicious contact address, either email or postal, or the title of the publication covers an area of knowledge that is overly wide. The problem is that, for non specialists, it is not always easy to distinguish scrupulous, exacting material from material that is not. Beall stopped updating his blog and list in January 2017.¹⁰

If a clinician or researcher has published an article recently, they will see that their email account is inundated on a daily basis with compliments about their recent publication, linked to invitations to publish in these journals, failing to mention that there is a payment involved, or if it is mentioned then they are even offered discounts "for their extensive career as a researcher". The invitation to publish is repeated in all of them with a text that demonstrates the low or complete lack of scientific quality of the journal. We could say something like "everything goes," whether this be a leader, a clinical case history, an image, "their line of research" – sent something that we will rapidly publish.

Sometimes it is not easy to distinguish between a false, predatory, scam journal from one that it not. They pretend to be legitimate, imitating and even pirating web sites and the practices of established journals. Review is carried out in low quality pairs or is directly fake. They use electronic mail addresses taken from publications to request articles, or to include the recipients in the editorial board. They do not use academic editing standards. The email received may even be ridiculous in many aspects, including the language.

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The name and/or address they sign with are usually fake, as is the address of the supposed publishing house office.

This hoodwinking or scam has recently expanded into the invitation to participate in the publication of a book “with worldwide sales” or the invitation to give a conference on any subject at an international congress. Something must be done about this issue. There are associations of editors but not of authors.

As mentioned, the key point of scam journals is to take advantage of the needs scientists, clinicians and/or university professors have of progressing in their hospital or academic career. However, we should not forget the accreditation agencies such as ANECA,¹¹ which are well aware there are journals that, even with bibliometric indexes and open access publishing (for which they could be considered as *open science*) actually fall into the category of predators. Logically, the publications within them are likely to be discarded. As mentioned by ANECA: “...clear distinction needs to be made between open knowledge and pre-paid open publication. There are journals which public research after the payment of a certain amount and we could believe this to be open science, but it is not true...”¹²

They are completely removed from serious journals, with years of tradition. The literature mentions that behind a journal there is a scientific society that supports and finances publication, whilst establishing a serious paired review process of the articles it receives, which is the case of the “Revista Española de Cirugía Ortopédica y Traumatología” (RECOT) along with many others.^{13,14} RECOT, the official body of the Spanish Orthopaedic and Traumatology Society (SECOT) was founded in 1944 (then called “Revista de Ortopedia y Traumatología” (*Orthopaedic and Traumatology Journal*)), and is the main Spanish journal of the speciality. It is currently published in Spanish and English and has been indexed since 2012.¹⁵ From January 2021 RECOT opted for open access. This leads to immediate access, without any requirements for registration, subscription or payment for the material published, with subsequent greater visibility and distribution of its articles.¹⁶ Open access means the authors have to cover the cost of the publishing process. However, as its current Director, Jesús Vila y Rico and the SECOT management have properly informed its readership since 2019, the society will bear this cost for all of its member authors. There is no question that a scientific journal is of great value for a scientific society and reciprocally, a journal affiliated with a society acquires greater scientific rigour.¹³

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