

Predatory Journals and Fake News in Audiology

Published September 3rd, 2019

Robert V. Harrison, PhD, DSc



In my role as research director in the Department of Otolaryngology (U of T) I regularly highlighted issues related to publishing in “fake journals”. These journal publishers are predatory on academics and clinicians and offer a quick and easy way to get published. *Canadian Audiologist* would *NEVER* work this way. It is a short-cut because there is no peer review process (even though some journals claim otherwise) and your work will be made freely available through “open access.” All you need is a few thousand dollars!

Every week I receive dozens of email requests to publish in journals that appear to have convincing titles related to auditory science or otolaryngology. I also get requests to publish in journals that are totally inappropriate (e.g. *Virology & Retrovirology Journal*; *Annals of Nanotechnology*). Thus, “phishing” has taken hold in the academic world.



The predatory journal problem started about 10 years ago when the concept of “open access” tempted scammers to short-cut any peer review process and simply charge a fee to have your work available online. Vanity press had arrived in science. These scams were documented by Denver Librarian Jeffrey Beall, who published his “Beall’s List” of predatory journals. Beall shut down his list in 2017 after litigation threats to, and pressures from his employers. However, the original list is archived and available on-line, and other new list groups exist, e.g.:

<https://predatoryjournals.com/journals/>

Ten years back there were a few hundred journals listed. Now the number of fake journals approaches two thousand! The lists are constantly modified, with new fake journal names added, and some taken off because they have transitioned into a more legitimate form, or have taken legal action to be delisted. The good news is that I have found relatively few journals with titles containing the words “audiology,” “hearing,” “otolaryngology,” etc. However, dozens of more general titles might attract one into the dark zone.

There are good reasons for resisting the easy-publish temptation or not falling for the scam. First, avoiding a peer-review is not conducive to good science. Secondly if you want to have your paper read by others, the promise of open-access is only good if the journal is indexed in well-known databases such as Medline or Web of Science. The third problem is financial. Predatory journals exist to make money from you. The new publication entry on your CV will cost you a lot of money. (Having said that, most legitimate journals also charge exorbitant publication and open access fees.)

But the biggest harm of all is potential embarrassment. In the early years of predatory journals, many academics published their work unwittingly, drawn in by a polite invitation to submit a manuscript, and not understanding the scam. Nowadays research agencies, university promotions committees and academic employers look out for such dubious publications. Beware, there may be some serious repercussions.

<https://theness.com/neurologicablog/index.php/open-access-predatory-journals/>

The Neurologica blog page (see link above) paints a darker forecast. If predatory journals persist they will “dilute quality science in a sea of bad and bogus science”. There is a possibility that “entire fields of fake science will be able to thrive, and we will lose the ability to tell the difference.”