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Editorial

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Circumventing predatory conferences and predatory journals in medical sciences issues by bogus agencies

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Invitation to take part in "Global", "International", and "Worldwide" conferences seem attractive and prestigious and often with affiliation in Europe, USA, Japan or other well-developed Asia countries. Moreover, the possibility of sharing a stage with a "top speaker" and/or eligibility for reduced registration and accommodation fees and being listed in the abstract book on the "international" level might be a hook not only for young researchers but even for experienced ones. A broad range of submissions, low processing fees, increasing authors' citations, high "local" impact factor, an invitation to write an article for money, "gift-authorship", suboptimal author guidelines or special offers (Fig. 1).

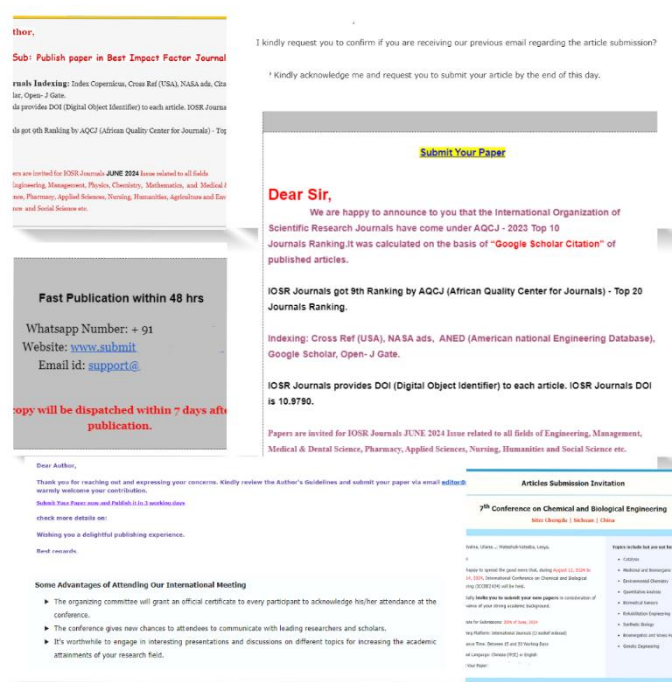


Figure 1. The collage of emails from predatory journals and predatory organizations with invitations for article submission, abstract submission, and conference invitation. The typical signs of predatory schemes are a broad range of submissions, processing fees, citation promotions, unknown impact factors, "gifts" authorships, suboptimal author guidelines or special offers

"Pseudo" means something that pretends to be the truth. If it is not, we face deception, fraud or a lie. Science is always valuable and treasured by people [1], but the word "pseudoscience" makes this meaning disgusting. In particular, pseudoscience in Medicine that can spread misinformation, leading away from evidence-based Medicine, decreasing adherence to proven guidelines of treatments and public health measures, as well as leading patients to seek ineffective or unproven therapy or care. But the worst thing is to be captured by fraud and involved in pseudoscience without realizing it.

This editorial focuses on how pseudoscience products created by diverse scam agencies can be spotted and how to protect our research from predatory publication pitfalls [2] that are very common. It aims to describe the main traps the authors may fall into and to indicate red flags that can warn the readers about the dangers and strategies on how to avoid them.

Pseudoscience and predatory publications: how it works?

The contact information, most often email address, which was taken from already published paper (even in a reputable journal), professional organization subscription, conference abstract or vendor subscriptions, will be used by predatory publishers to make contact with potential victims [3]. It is remarkable that the number of emails from predator publishers rapidly grow after a successful publication or visiting big conference or congress. It seems very rewarding for young or inexperienced researchers to think that the research is interesting for the audience, but it is very often not the case. How not to get deceived, and how to choose a legitimate audience and the right way to

present the results of the study? Here we provide “red flags” that may help to avoid the pitfalls of predators in publishing results of medical research.

Predatory conferences

The invitation to be a top speaker at the conference is often based on the recently published article.

Typical characteristics:

1. The organized conference doesn't refer to any professional scientific society or institution with a decent scientific reputation.
2. Reduced registration fee and/or accommodation. The organizers strictly provide the accommodation. Despite invitation, one who is invited should pay “the reduced fee”.
3. Listed as a top-speaker among other notable researchers. Checking the list of “notable” speakers might be disappointing, realising there are no real experts in this field.
4. The affiliation of the organizing committee members is unknown. Often, there is no precise contact information and no connections to the respected Institutions. In most cases, some unknown or recently created offices with US or European locations are used to impress or make it trustworthy.
5. This is a repeating email. The recipient will receive further emails extending the abstract submission deadline and proposing additional discounts, such as for Conference materials, etc.
6. Broad range submission. One conference might include medicine, economics, politics and other areas.
7. Format of presentation. Typically, online format will be offered if you cannot visit the conference on site. Nevertheless, they will ask for payment.

Predatory conferences papers

Predatory conference papers or abstracts are associated with predatory conferences but may appear as a separate part. Unfortunately, it is difficult to detect fraud as the organizers usually create a fake conference and published an electronic abstract book available in internet. The submitters, especially from low- and middle-income countries, are thirsty for international publication and ready to pay for it quite often a reasonable fee.

Typical characteristics:

1. Absence of scientific or professional societies among organisers.
2. Low (adequate) price for publication.
3. Electronic abstract book.
4. No peer-review.
5. Flexible deadline.
6. Remote participation: There is no need to join the conference because there is no conference.
7. Possibility to submit an abstract in your language (not English).

Increasing scientific profile / citations

The “We write, you pay” model requires the academic society to see the results of the research activity. The number of reads, downloads, citations, impact factor, etc., are markers of the researcher's performance. Some organisations provide “tools” to improve the author profile, but this is an artificial, unethical intervention [4].

Typical characteristics:

1. Proposal to increase citation.
2. Proposal to add the author to the author block of some articles without any contribution (only financial).
3. Fake citations.
4. “Supporting” manuscript submission to the Journals.

5. Services for language editing and academic English with no guarantee to perform it.
6. Publishing in Supplemental issue.

Supporting the researcher

"You write, we pay" model. The invitation to pay for writing the manuscript and doing research. Accepting this invitation, the author supports and creates pseudoscience.

Typical characteristics:

1. No grant proposal.
2. No official institution or research theme.
3. The author's contribution will be divided among those who pay for it.
4. No authorship, copyright authorship.
5. Unknown agreement and financial process.
6. Poor journal quality (lack of peer-review process, editing, proofreading).

To sum up, by implementing these strategies and being aware of predatory practices of blocklisting agencies, "copycat" journals, publisher imitators, hijacked journals, formerly legitimate, but lacking proper editorial oversight and peer review, leading to the publication of low-quality or plagiarized content and prioritizing money-making over scientific integrity [5], we can prevent the spread of pseudoscience in medical sciences. Attending and promoting conferences organized by established scientific societies or institutions [6–8] with a strong reputation for scientific rigor will help present your research in a right way. Mentoring junior and inexperienced researchers and informing about ethical problems related to predatory publishing practices is crucial for progress in the academic medical sphere.

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