

More and more bad apples...

... are obviously growing on the sprawling tree of scientific journals. A suspicion, which has recently been fuelled by a plethora of revelations.

One source in this respect is the essays and blog postings of Jeffrey Beall, who, as a librarian at the University of Colorado in Denver, sharply watches the increasing emergence of so-called bogus journals. Those are mainly published online-only by dubious enterprises, which Beall himself calls “predatory publishers”. In an article in *The Charleston Advisor*, a peer-reviewed journal for librarians, he describes their “business idea” as follows:

“These publishers are predatory because their mission is not to promote, preserve and make available scholarship; instead, their mission is to exploit the author-pays, Open-Access model for their own profit. They work by spamming scholarly e-mail lists, with calls for papers and invitations to serve on nominal editorial boards. If you subscribe to any professional email lists, you likely have received some of these solicitations.”

In the “Careers Forum” of *The Chronicle of Higher Education* an unidentified researcher recently described an example of how such predatory publishers approach their “prey” in more detail:

“I was asked by this company to serve as an editorial board member. I declined, as my research area expertise has shifted dramatically from the subject matter of the journal.

“This group then took my name and affiliation, and then listed me as a member of their board without my permission! Incredibly unprofessional behaviour, in my opinion. Indeed, I am quite upset by this – it’s an abuse, really.

“Calls to their office have gone unanswered. I’ve submitted a request to have my name removed immediately. But I fear I might have to get my school’s legal office involved.

“My recommendation is to ignore requests from this group. But make sure they’ve not used your name inappropriately by checking their editorial board membership list at the journal’s site.

“The sad thing is that I somewhat favour the move toward open access publishing. The high cost of publication in some journals is impeding the speedy dissemination of new data. This kind of bad behavior by this publishing group threatens to give the whole movement a bad name.”

Once an editorial board member of one of those journals, it is very likely that you will soon find an email in your mailbox reading along the lines: “As an editorial board member, you are requested to submit at least one article and one editorial for this year on your expertise. For more details on how to write an editorial please go to...” And the author pays for the privilege...!

Well, of course, it is not very likely that anyone falls for that sham – although some of those journals have focussed on contacting inexperienced, easy-to-massage postdocs. Nevertheless,

it is utterly alarming how rapidly the number of such predatory publishers has increased in the last couple of years. Jeffrey Beall, on his blog *Metadata*, is running a “predators” list, in which he has so far identified 25 groups with names like *Bentham Open*, *International Research Journals*, *Libertas Academia* and *OMICIS Publishing Group*. Each of them, in turn, hosts a plethora of individual fake journals; *Bentham*, for example, comprises 230 titles, *OMICIS* is home to another 200. *Libertas Academia*, for example, charges €1,250 processing fees for an article in *Biochemistry Insights*.

Beall’s clear advice, therefore:

“Do not do business with the above publishers, including submitting article manuscripts, serving on editorial boards, buying advertising, etc. There are numerous traditional, legitimate journals that will publish your quality work for free, including many legitimate, open-access publishers.”

However, that’s not yet the end of the story. In the course of his investigations, Beall identified at least one journal publishing sham articles for completely different reasons. Its title is *Journal of Applied Pharmacy* and it is published by the Intellectual Consortium of Drug Discovery & Technology Development, Inc. in Saskatoon, Canada. When taking a closer look at this Open-Access, free of charge, online journal, Beall realised that a Pakistani botanist named Tahira Mughal had published altogether twelve articles in it. However, as he found, “Most all of Tahira Mughal’s articles contain passages, some long, from earlier publications written by others, without attribution.”

What was going on here? Beall’s further investigations soon revealed that “the *Journal of Applied Pharmacy* is not a money-making venture. Instead, it is a bogus journal set up to help Pakistani scholars get the required credits to get tenure and other recognition from the Higher Education Commission, Pakistan. They need publications in peer-reviewed, recognised foreign journals, and some Pakistani expatriates in Saskatoon have created the journal just for this purpose.”

And because the end finally justifies the means, the *Journal of Applied Pharmacy* apparently doesn’t give a damn about publication ethics.

One more bad apple on the tree. And, as it sadly seems, by far not the last.

