

Alerting the medical research community to the risks of predatory journals and conferences

Published in March 2022, [Combatting Predatory Academic Journals and Conferences](#), an InterAcademy Partnership (IAP)¹ report, gave a **stark warning** to the global research community and wider stakeholders on the growth of predatory journals and conferences, and their damaging impacts if left unchallenged.

Context

Predatory journals and conferences are driven entirely by profit rather than scholarship: they solicit articles from researchers through deceitful or misleading practices that exploit the pressure on them to publish and present their work. These practices include rapid pay-to-publish and pay-to-present services without rigorous peer review, journal and conference titles that are deceptively similar to those of legitimate ones, and aggressive spam invitations to solicit papers and abstracts, including outside of a researcher's own expertise. In the case of *fake* conferences, they do not take place at all, and conference fees are not returned.

Over 1,800 researchers from across all disciplines completed an IAP survey on predatory practices and over 80% of them perceive that these practices are a serious problem in countries where they work. Results indicate that nearly a quarter of respondents may have already used predatory journals or conferences. **Researchers in the medical sciences may be more vulnerable than those in other disciplines.** Most analyses of predatory publishing have been conducted in biomedicine, medical and dental sciences, where predatory practices appear to be widespread. Predatory conferences are maybe especially acute in vocational education, where sponsored clinical research of dubious quality can be presented to medical practitioners with potentially serious healthcare consequences. Over a third (36%) of entries under Cabell's Predatory Reports - listing over 16,100 predatory journals (as of April 2022) - claim to publish within the medical sciences: that's over 5,740 predatory medical journals.

The adverse impacts of predatory journals and conferences are not widely recognised, with many researchers – including those in (bio)medicine – unaware that they even need to consider a journal or conference's authenticity. Organisations representing the medical research community – including national academies and professional societies – have a vital role to play in raising awareness of these damaging and pervasive practices to preserve the integrity of medical research in the public and private sector.

Why does this matter?

If left unchallenged, the risks of predatory journals and conferences are profound. Poor, untrustworthy research, including that supporting pseudoscience or conspiracy theories, can flourish and even find its way into public policy. Conversely, quality research can remain uncited or even lost, failing to contribute to future research knowledge, medical advances and/or policy formulation.

¹ IAP is the global network of over 140 national and regional academies of science, engineering and medicine who work together on issues of mutual concern and global importance. More information is available at www.interacademies.org.



The potential infiltration of predatory journals and conferences in the medical research community is a concern and risks undermining the integrity of medical and clinical research. Numerous specialised and vocational journals report that medical (and dental) students are being increasingly targeted by predatory outlets. Publishing in medical journals and presenting at health conferences are valued accomplishments across the continuum of medical education, and instrumental in securing places on competitive residency programmes, yet publication ethics and appraisal of journal and conference credibility are not typically included in medical training programmes.

What can be done?

IAP has tasked its own members with a raft of practicable recommendations to help combat predatory journals and conferences. Representative bodies of medical research, including national academies of medicine, can do the same to help their members practice due diligence and serve as effective mentors and supervisors to their junior colleagues.

To protect against predatory practices, representative medical research bodies at national, regional and global levels – whether funding councils, academies, professional societies or unions- can:

- Run programmes that highlight the dangers of predatory journals and conferences, such as free and open virtual webinars that focus on raising awareness of predatory practices, including how to avoid them and the consequences of not doing so.
- Incorporate targeted training on the dangers of predatory practices and how to identify them in their training programmes for members of selection/promotion committees; for early career medics/researchers (e.g. IAP's Young Physicians Leadership (YPL) programme and the UK Academy of Medical Sciences' mentoring programme). Such initiatives could highlight the IAP spectrum of predatory publishing and conferencing behaviours, as well as other guides and resources listed in the IAP report.
- Create incentive schemes for using high quality journals and conferences, and disincentives for using predatory ones.
- For those with publishing arms, implement strategies to minimise predatory behaviour/infiltration. This includes facilitating a discussion on how to transition to a low-cost, sustainable, online and less profit-driven model of publishing, ensuring that the research community is involved. This could be accomplished through targeted feedback sessions with members at annual meetings, public virtual forums, and engagement with early career research cohorts.
- For those who fund research grants, metrics for evaluating grant applications and recipients should be reviewed and revised to account for quality rather than quantity, impact rather than numbers, to help effect positive change in research culture.

For further information, please read the report at www.interacademies.org/project/predatorypublishing or contact the project secretariat at secretariat@iappartnership.org.

