

Good publications need good research

The dilution of academic standards and poor quality publications have become a global concern. Recently, in an editorial of *Current Science*, SC Lakhota, an eminent scientist from Banaras Hindu University (BHU) has raised a very important issue regarding predatory journals and academic pollution. This problem is presently worrying almost every conscientious academicians.^[1] Substantial efforts from Jeffrey Beall from the University of Colorado have immensely helped to create awareness on this subject. Notwithstanding that Beall has strong views against Ayurveda, his contributions to expose bad practices of predatory publishers are commendable. The Beall's list of predatory publishers has grown from merely 18 in 2011 to nearly 700 in 2015. This list also contains over 26 misleading metrics companies fabricating spurious variants and counterfeits of impact factors, which are used by predatory journals to attract authors.

Serious concerns have been expressed over declining ethics and quality of research publications. The World Association of Medical Editors (www.wame.org) recommends publication ethics policies. International Committee of Medical Journal Editors offers guidance for conduct, reporting, editing, and publication (<http://www.icmje.org>). The Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) as a forum of editors and publishers of peer review journals promotes integrity in research publications.^[2] Recent editorial of *British Medical Journal* has rightly suggested that firm action is needed on predatory journals, particularly because they are harming researchers from low and middle-income countries.^[3] A recent analysis of authors contributing to such journals has indicated that most of them are from developing countries, especially India, Nigeria, and other African and middle East countries.^[4] This is certainly not good for any country.

Two main reasons for this state of affairs in India include criteria for career advancement and promotions for teachers and mandatory publications for PhD students. These compulsions are mainly responsible for desperate attempts for publications. The University Grants

Commission (UGC), with good intentions, proposed a measurable metrics as an academic performance indicator. However, the UGC guidelines have not explained what is "peer reviewed" and have given International Standard Serial Number as a criterion for a research journal. As a result, hundreds of new self-styled entrepreneurs and shops have emerged in last few years who have started a lucrative business of publishing predatory journals as open access, online or e-journals. Many private universities and colleges have started their own journals instead of genuinely adopting research culture. Many predatory commercial journals advertise and assure the fast track publication of any manuscript for costs. Academics succumb because of the tendency of finding shortcuts and easy ways to show improved performance. Most such journals are from natural, applied and biomedical sciences, technology and engineering, and management disciplines, where they have a ready market.

The situation of Ayurveda sector is particularly disturbing. Recently, faculty members from BHU have published a critical appraisal of peer-reviewed journals of Ayurveda.^[5] This study indicates that during the last couple of years there is mushrooming growth of new journals, mostly open access and online who are struggling to maintain the expected standards. Authors of this study have suggested an urgent need to create awareness about poor quality journals, training programs on research methodology, and scientific writing skills to the Ayurveda researchers. There is a need for uniform guidelines and streamlining the strategies for Ayurveda journals. Researchers need to be careful and must make sure that, their work is not being communicated to predatory journals. One of the J-AIM editorials had raised the issue of ethical and scientific aspects of research publications.^[6]

It is pertinent here to state the initiative by Savitribai Phule Pune University (SPPU). The Vice Chancellor of SPPU had appointed a committee of senior professors to frame guidelines for ethical publishing and ways to avoid predatory journals. Report of this committee is available at the university website. http://www.unipune.ac.in/uop_files/Report-Guidelines_20-5-15.pdf.

This effort is being appreciated by many academicians, researchers, and editors from India as also from different regions of the world. Instead of merely worrying, expressing concerns, criticizing the situation or blaming authors, the proactive step taken by SPPU is exemplary. We hope that many other universities and institutions will

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develop their own guidelines for research publications and take concrete steps to improve the quality of scientific research and its publications.

Before deciding to publish, it is necessary to do a careful due diligence of journals' veracity. As a simple rule, the journal must be indexed in following globally recognized agencies such as Scopus, PubMed, MEDLINE, Web of Science, Scimago, and Google Scholar. Even some of these databases are already polluted with spurious journals. Therefore, it is important to ensure that the journal is a member of COPE and is indexed in least any two of these databases. Authors should be very careful to weed out similar sounding names giving the false identity of these reputed agencies. Starting from next issue, J-AIM is adopting a policy of accepting citations and references only from journals indexed in the above-mentioned agencies. As editorial discretion, some exceptions will be made for good journals and periodicals of traditional knowledge systems.

Finally, it is important to remember that only good research can lead to good publications, which can only happen with due enquiry, methodical investigation, innovation, and hard work. There are no shortcuts. The desperation or temptation to publish poor quality work, plagiarized or fudged data in dubious journals or starting own journals to compromise on the rigor of external review will bring only disgrace to individuals, institutions, and countries, which must be avoided.

We hope that serious efforts will be taken by academia to create proper awareness, issue clear guidelines, conducive research environment to improve the quality of research. Once this happens, predatory journals will automatically starve and thousands of gullible students, faculty, and researchers will be saved from falling prey to their ilk.

Bhushan Patwardhan

*Interdisciplinary School of Health Sciences, Savitribai Phule Pune University, Pune, Maharashtra, India
E-mail: bpwardhan@gmail.com*

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J-AIM policy for citations

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2. Exceptions can be made for good journals and periodicals of traditional knowledge systems at editorial discretion.