EDITORIAL

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Predatory Journals and Publishers – Dilemmas: How to Assess it and How to Avoid it?

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1. WHY IS WRITTEN AND TO WHOM THIS EDITORIAL TARGETED?

A few days ago authors of the papers deposited on the ResearchGate platform informed us by a letter from the ResearchGate team titled: "A note on recent content takedowns" where has been noticed that ResearchGate recently received demands from two publishers: Elsevier and the American Chemical Society (ACS) - "to remove certain content that they alleged infringed their copyrights" (1).

The main statement of the ResearchGate (RG) is: "These types of requests are not new: we have received many similar requests from them in the past, and, in accordance with applicable law, have complied with them. But these most recent requests were notable because of the number of articles involved. Although privately stored files were not affected, the demands by Elsevier and ACS resulted in the removal of around 200,000 public files. In the context of a community of over 20 million researchers, this is unfortunate, rather than existential, but it has sparked an acute reaction from many of our members who believe in the importance of open science" (1). Further RG explains: "Some of you have commented on the serious nature of our communications with you regarding the removal of content. We appreciate that the tone of our messaging was rather direct. International laws require that we implement a policy regarding repeat takedown requests from publishers, and we felt duty-bound to communicate these policies to you in no uncertain terms. This is done for the protection of users and the benefit of the ResearchGate community" (1).

Concerning the future work (perspectives) RG stated: "Finally, we are mindful of recent changes in European copyright law in some countries, particularly relating to Article 17 of the Directive on Copyright in the Digital Single Market (2). While we believe we are not subject to such laws due to the nature of our business, we decided to nonetheless take advantage of advancements in technology which we believe will be beneficial for researchers. In particular, we have started implementing a new system - called "Jarvis" - which matches publisher rights information with user content at the time of upload. Where a publisher has provided the required information, Jarvis can prevent a researcher from unintentionally uploading content that is not allowed to be public. As always, it remains the responsibility of researchers to know and confirm their rights before uploading any content" (1).

The final message of the RG team sent to its users' is: "The future of academic publishing is open. Let's work together to unlock its true potential" (1).

According to this letter and content of the message from the RG team, as an experienced former and current Editor of a few indexed journals and prolific contributor and author of a lot of papers, especially in the Science Editing field and Scientometrics (3-9), let me expressed some views and comments regarding important facts and problems within Science Editing area and concerns of the scientific and academic community.

Two extremely important problems in scientific publishing represent plagiarism and predation. More and more authors of articles in this scientific field, in the absence of other opportunities to engage in science, in this period of the Corona pandemic crisis imposed as a devastating consequence, began to deal with these topics, write about plagiarism and predation, conduct meta-analyze, and recommend what and how authors, especially who are not

close to the fields of Science Editing and Publishing, to deal (prevent and avoid) these issues.

So, it would be interesting to make a serious study and reveal to which fields do all the authors, who have written articles on these topics, so far belong, and what are their essential intentions in order to make advancement in science or produce something else?

This is the main reason why I wrote possible assumptions about both, in this Editorial.

Namely, from 2012 to 2015, I was a member of the European Association of Science Editors (EASE) Council. At my first meeting with a large number of editors of journals from several scientific fields from Europe and worldwide, held in Tallinn (Estonia) in December 2012, I publicly discussed the problem of plagiarism and unethical behavior in the field of Science Editing.

From then until today, I have published several articles on this issue (10-20), but also organized several scientific conferences in this area (21, 22). Finally, with a group of like-minded people and fellow editors of biomedical journals in the Balkans, we have prepared several strategic documents (23, 24) to try to prevent and reduce the problems in editing and publishing journals to a minimum, because these problems cannot be eradicated by any known methods and mechanisms. And there are many reasons for that.

Then, in 2013, at the meeting of EASE Council and journal's editors in Split (Croatia), I made one statement: that the job of an editor is difficult, stressful, arduous, and expensive. If you are a journal editor, your loved ones protest and hate you (because you steal the time you need to devote to them), some authors of articles (because we often do not accept their articles for publication), some of our contributors (because they hate this type of work), etc. The practice has caused me this feelings and impressions for attitude of others.

Let me elaborate and comment the mentioned two main problems in science and publishing, with main focus (emphasis) to predatory publishers and journals:

a) Plagiarism is probably the greatest problem in the academic community, especially in the Balkan region, which is not possible to solve it by Editors of the journals and academic institutions which are responsible for avoiding it in the practice as recommended by the Committee of Publishing Ethics (COPE) and other associations and bodies. In the Chapter 19 I authored in the book "A Guide to the Scientific Career" (25) I concluded that even we can check and detect online every submitted paper via computer system (by Plagiarism Checker(s) and a few other ICT types of equipment as help to us during editing papers, this problem is fully unsolvable.

Plagiarism is the most common way to compromise the academic integrity of the author. It is defined as illegal trespassing spiritual property that includes any use of other people's ideas, opinions or theories, either literally, or paraphrased, which does not mention the author and source of information (26-31). It is assumed that the most cited person in the academic community, scholars, and experts who have published their research results in one of the journals indexed in the references of the world-renowned databases and whose articles are available for assessment of their scientific validity through their representation in the form of abstracts or full article on the website of these on-line databases (3-6).

COPE Guidelines for prevention and dealing with plagiarism (32) are based on the ICMJE criteria (33), as well as guidelines and recommendations of other associations and documents, such as EASE (34), Council of Science Editors (35), "Sarajevo Declaration on Integrity and Visibility of Scholarly Journals" (23), etc.

b) Predatory in publishing is also very serious and somehow neglected problem in the scientific community worldwide without proper guidelines and approach for preventing and solving it (36-40). A special case for analysis is the role and significance of the effects of the List of Predatory Journals by American librarian Jeffrey Beall, whose "List of Potential Predatory journals" is cited by many authors, "based on his criteria that none of the world's scientific and academic institutions have analyzed or accredited, but which could be officially used" (41, 42).

The Beall's list has provoked a storm of outrage among thousands of publishers and editors of journals, who have been put in a position to be scientifically belittled by his criteria and list, and many authors to avoid them as potential journals in which to publish their articles. The authors which are quoting Beall and his list did not use a scientific method of meta-analyzing articles from his list in which they could confirm Beall's assessments and the content and quality of articles from the list of predatory journals (9, 39, 41).

An illustrative article by Refat Aljumili on a serious and critical approach has revealed what we have stated in this article: "The story of „Beall's List" started probably in early or late 2010 when a guy called Jeffrey Beall – a librarian at Auraria Library, University of Colorado, in Denver, Colorado – came up with a blog „Scholarly Open Access", as well as a list of questionable journals and publishers, or as Jeffrey Beall likes to call it „Potential, possible or probable predatory scholarly open-access publishers", and gave himself the right to ward academic scholarly publication" (41).

Shortly after this list was established, Jeffrey Beall added many open-access publishers to it and continued to update it regularly – by adding to the list and removing from it - and introduced many authors and researchers to the assumption that Open Access Journals (OAJ) are essentially "Predatory publishers and low-quality journals" (9, 41).

Beall's background and intentions in particular came away believing that "Beall's list" is a recognized authority in evaluating scholarly journals (9, 42). "Well, the truth is "Beall's list" has no affiliation to any governing body or organization accredited to scholarly publishing, and has no legal or academic value. If you follow some of Beall's work on his blog, and it makes no sense whatsoever!

His official web blog exposed the truth about Jeffrey Beall, particularly Walt Crawford's 2014 article "The Sad Case of Jeffrey Beall - Case and Insights", which provides

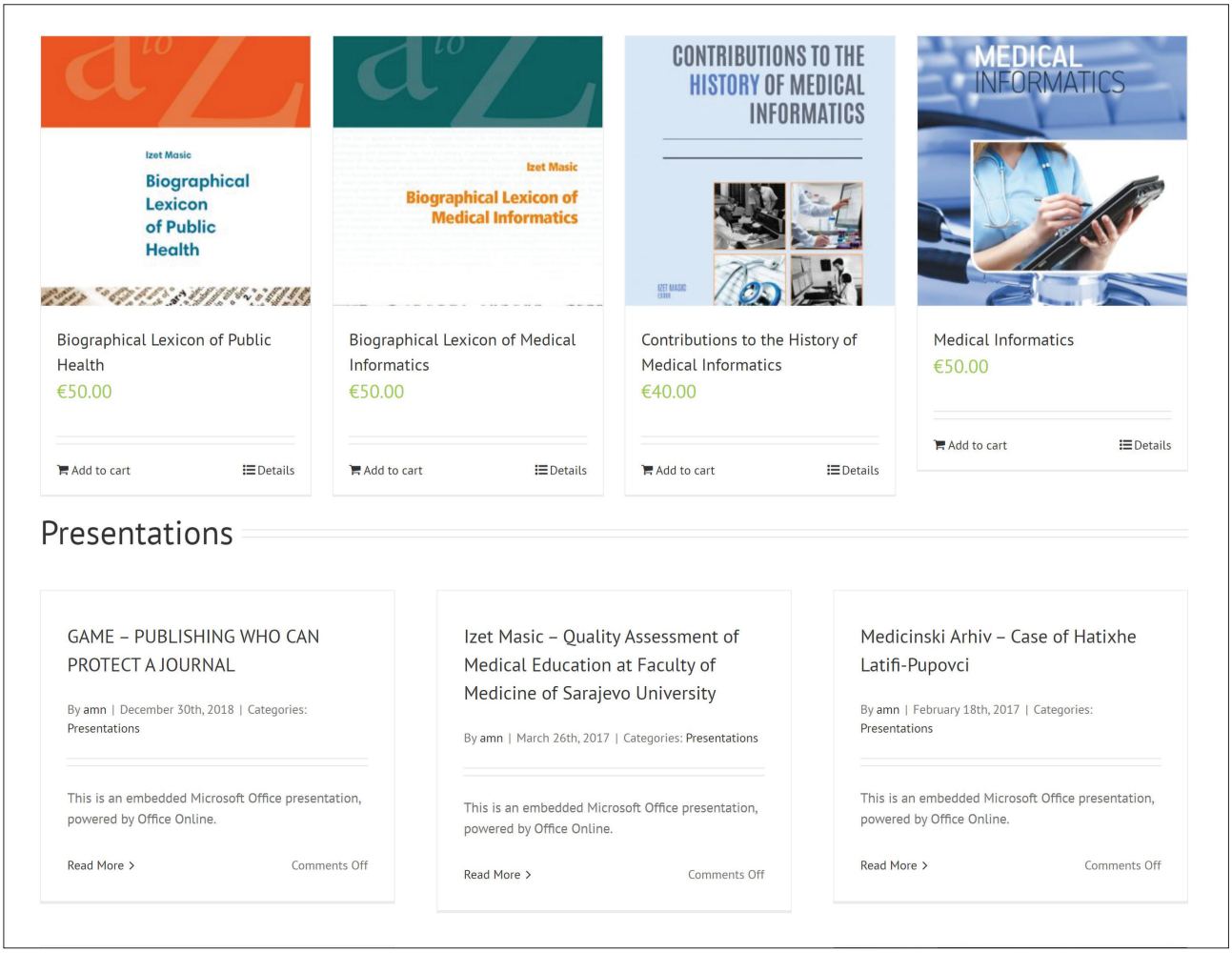


Figure 1. Screenshot from www.avicenapublisher.org website with presentation of two cases (Latifi and Muka) with expressed and proved unethical behaviors of both authors, but for Beall it was reason to put on the list Medical Archives as predatory - it was false Beall's decision without assessment is it correct or not (43)

a very detailed history about OAJs and directly addresses some of the broader issues with "Beall's list" (9, 42).

Additionally, as an example and argument, we can present a few cases in our practice, who can prove my statement: A case of Hatixhe-Latifi Pupovci and Taulant Muka (both cases presented in power presentation and deposited on www.avicenapublisher.org (43), were publisher explained the un-ethical behavior of them, but who causes Beall's decision about putting Avicena's name on his list (Figure 1).

Another case is presented in Figure 2, where the falsified Memo of Medical Archives journal by somebody without reasons why and for what purpose. We still research reasons and who have done it.

Additional examples are a few another cases - the journals from Bosnia and Herzegovina (B&H) accepted for indexing in the Scopus database as unprofessional and unethical examples. The journal "Folia Medica Facultatis Medicinae Universitatis Saraeviensis" (44), which was also accepted to Scopus several years ago without serious evaluation (re-established after more than 20 years of break). It is stated that its last issue is printed in March 2019, and the journal is signed as a Croatian journal that belongs to the University of Zagreb (Croatia). But the journal is published in Sarajevo (B&H), and its h-index is 1 (45). Other examples of mistakes of Scopus are two journals from Bosnia and Herzegovina: Acta Medica Academica (AMA) (http://ama.ba/index.php/ama/about) and Medicina Academica Mostariensia (MAM) (https://lnss-bosnia-herzegovina.libguides.com/c.php?g=669777&p=4819669)), which Scopus accepted for indexing without checking when they have been founded, what was the name when journal started with printing, when stopped to print it and when re-started with a new name without mentioning breaking continuity of printing. AMA was printed almost 40 years as an Annual of Academy of Sciences and Arts of BiH and MAM is printing as a supplement of Psychiatria Danubina (the publisher is Medicinska Naklada, Zagreb, founded in 2013). The same case is new established Journal of Science, Arts and Religion (founded in 2021), which is published as a supplement of Psychiatria Danubina journal (Medicinska naklada, Zagreb, and in Impressum of the journal is written that journal is indexed in the same databases as Psychiatria Danubina (https://hrcak.srce.hr/index.php?show=toc&id_broj=20451&lang=en). Both of mentioned journals are out of scope of Psychiatria Danubina journal. There are a lot of similar examples in other countries, but nobody analyzed the current problems.

But, the Scopus expert's evaluation team rejected Medical Archives and Materia Socio-Medica journals to include them in the Scopus database because Publisher Avicena is on Beall's list. The same situation is with the WoS evaluation team. A lot of other journal's cases "suffering" as consequences of following opinion/assessment of bibliographer's expert Beall's standards about the state of him - who is the predator.

2. THE REAL AND FINAL OBSERVATIONS ABOUT VARIOUS CONSEQUENCES PREDATORY CAN PRODUCE

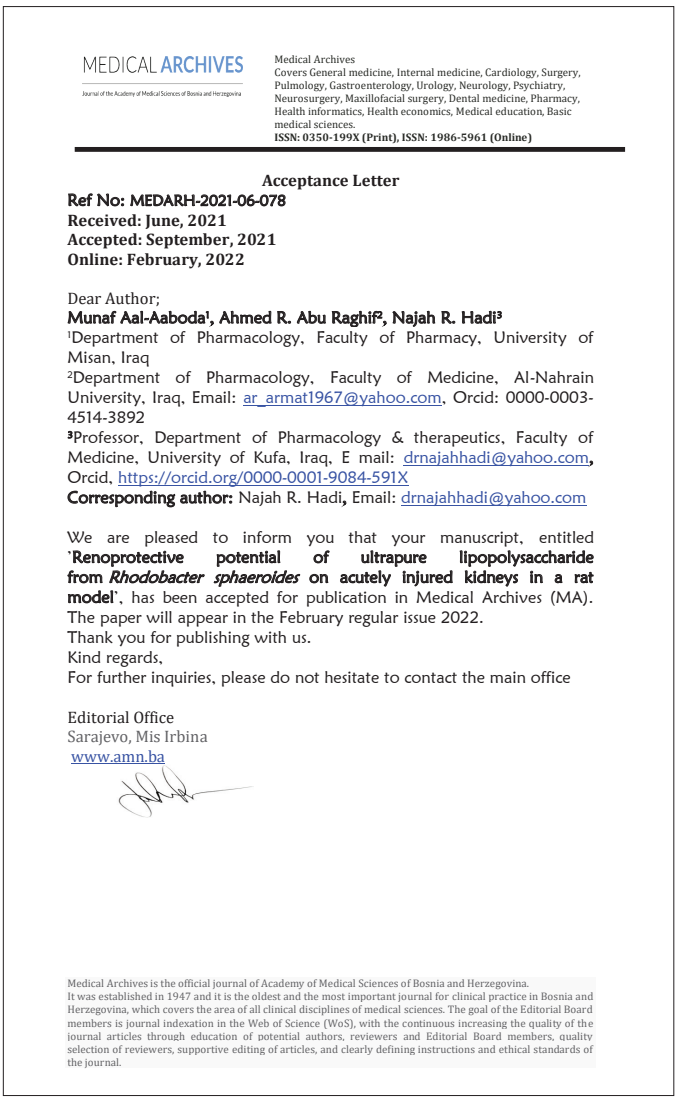
Furthermore, in the last 10 years, with exponential progression, both invited and uninvited, informed and uninformed, those with experience and those without it in this scientific sphere, have embarked on various debates about predation - about the problem that reminds us by e-mail messages from predatory publishers and journals in our inboxes we are receiving almost every day. We get PDF versions of the published publications of various authors around the world, who think about predation and give their criticisms and "judgments", very often unsubstantiated and inaccurate, and rely on the now well-known "Beall's list" of predator's publishers and journals.

I have taken it upon myself to express my opinion and judgment in this Editorial on the occasion of a recent debate initiated by a group of authors.

I believe, as well as my close associates in this journal, that both in the previously cited articles, are somewhat right, but above all their debate pointed to a key problem - that Beal's list is not transparent enough. Jeffrey Beall, the librarian by academic basic activity (Ph.D. in the field of librarianship), has taken upon himself the responsibility to (and only it/he) to make a list of predators of journal publishers according to some of his criteria and standards. In his superficial opinion and without proper analysis and evidence, he put publishers on some kind of "black list", not thinking about consequences, that these publishers do other jobs and make a living from those jobs. And the harm he caused in manner ruined those jobs by tarnishing their name. And he has not been adequately sanctioned for such behavior so far. On the contrary, quoting his views and actions, the mentioned authors give him formality as if they were in order and, by God (Beall), allow the public to settle accounts with publishers and editors based on them. On the other hand, it is clear that Springer, as a publisher, is trying to hide the fact that it is a predatory organization, at least when it comes to Frontiers.

An open debate is going on in 2021 about a published paper by two Polish authors in the following dynamics:

- On Feb. 7, 2021, Vít Macháček và Martin Srholec from Charles University published this paper "Predatory publishing in Scopus: evidence on cross-country differences" in Scientometrics (46);
- A day later, Nature comments about this news that Scopus has stopped adding content from most of the flagged titles, but the analysis highlights how poor-quality science is infiltrating literature (47);
- On 6/5, Fred Fenter, Editor of Frontiers publisher requested Scientometrics to retract that paper due to mention about 29 journals of Frontiers (48);
- On 19/5, the authors of the paper, Martin Srholec and Vít Macháček, sent a letter of response to the Editor-in-Chief of Scientometrics, Wolfgang Glänzel (49);
- After that, Editor-in-Chief (EIC) of Scientometrics send this paper for post-publication review.
- On 12/7, the authors of the paper, Vít Macháček và Martin Srholec, replied to reviewer's comments (50);
- On 17/8, EIC of Scientometrics decided to retract this paper (51);



MEDICAL ARCHIVES
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Dear Author;
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We are pleased to inform you that your manuscript, entitled '**Renoprotective potential of ultrapure lipopolysaccharide from *Rhodobacter sphaeroides* on acutely injured kidneys in a rat model**', has been accepted for publication in Medical Archives (MA). The paper will appear in the February regular issue 2022.
Thank you for publishing with us.
Kind regards,
For further inquiries, please do not hesitate to contact the main office

Editorial Office
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www.amn.ba

Medical Archives is the official journal of Academy of Medical Sciences of Bosnia and Herzegovina. It was established in 1947 and it is the oldest and the most important journal for clinical practice in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which covers the area of all clinical disciplines of medical sciences. The goal of the Editorial Board members is journal indexation in the Web of Science (WoS), with the continuous increasing the quality of the journal articles through education of potential authors, reviewers and Editorial Board members, quality selection of reviewers, supportive editing of articles, and clearly defining instructions and ethical standards of the journal.

Figure 2. An example of the un-ethical behaviors in Editor's praxis. Somebody of authors used memo of Medical Archives and signature of the Publisher for private use. What Mr. Beall can say about it, and who will decide that, in this case, Journal and Publisher must be "signed" and named as predators?

- The Editor of Scientometrics is Ismael Rafols, from Leiden University, The Netherlands, decided to resign against this EIC's decision;
- On 9/9, another editor of Scientometrics, Cassidy Sugimoto, from Georgia University (USA), (President of the International Society for Scientometrics and Informetrics) requested to withdraw the decision of retraction as this paper was corrected;
- The EIC of Scientometrics Fred Fenter kept silent and did not reply to any comment;
- Many comments related to this paper are favoring authors. They doubted that Springer hold the stock of Frontiers and they needed to retract this paper to save Frontiers. Both of the authors strongly disagree with the retraction, because there is no credible academic justification for it (52).

We think that – to take a side with any of them in this debate will not contribute anything, on the contrary, it can do more harm. Such zealots are ready for any lawsuits and other methods of inflicting harm on anyone who tells them something that does not suit them.

As the ResearchGate team stated, the decision by Elsevier and ACS to simply remove content "is disappointing to the entire research community, not just because of the loss to science and researchers, but because there is a better way. Publishers such as Springer Nature and Wiley are working with us to explore the opportunities that openness unlocks for all actors in the scholarly publishing ecosystem, with the researcher at the center. Specifically, through (1) content syndication program, these publishers have placed their content on ResearchGate (not taken it away) and made it seamlessly available to eligible researchers". "This drives the consumption of content, reaches new audiences, and makes discovery and access easier for the researcher. This is the path for a brighter future in science" (1).

3. PREDATORY IN SCIENCE EDITING - FROM MY POINT OF VIEW

Namely, predation in publishing is mostly a consequence, not a cause. Predation arose because there was a complete formalization in official science, or only points of published papers are important for getting a job at universities and elsewhere. Few people wonder what is written in these articles. Since this is the case, and a job at a university or institute means a good salary and social influence, through which additional money can be earned, every year more and more cunning and immoral people, with published papers by predatory publishers and journals, go to universities and institutes, who do not choose the means to achieve that goal (money and influence). They are not interested in science or profession, only money, and influence, in a word, the POWER. To achieve that as soon as possible, they are ready for anything, and to invest (especially other people's money, for example in college) just to get to the credits, which they will later charge heavily. Predatory journals have only emerged due to high demand, or a large number of such authors described in this text.

Publishing, which is not predatory officially, is present in the Balkans, and some previously known publishers failed only because they traded publications, and in much darker ways than paying with money. There are many (which are just the tip of the iceberg) predatory practices, false reviews, "friendly" reviews, commissioned works from the pharmaceutical industry, etc., just as in reputable journals.

One of perhaps the most realistic and key solutions could be a GLOBAL appeal to the only possible thing that can save science from this horde of cunning liars and thieves IS its their complete separation from money and social influence.

How to achieve this perhaps utopian goal is neither easy nor a job for one individual or institution, but an invitation to all well-meaning scientists, especially those with editorial experience, to create standards and guidelines on how this problem can be solved or even aleviated globally - perhaps step by step.

4. CONCLUSION

The story of "Beall's List" induced and spoiled a lot of matters in the science editing area. Since 2010, this list has disavowed many authors and discouraged them from possibly applying their article to a journal to which they would potentially send an article for publication, but the "Beall's List" discourages them from deciding yes or no.

Many under-informed authors on predation in scientific publishing - who have probably never edited or published journals in their careers, scientific, academic or otherwise, with their analyzes, very often unfounded on real facts, which was one of the reasons for some journal or publisher found on the "Beall's List", undermine the author's doubts about their decisions, when it comes to where, when and to whom to send an article with the results of their study.

The most important fact is that Editors and reviewers of the submitted papers to some journals need to approach the evaluation of manuscripts submitted to journals with higher responsibility. Editors and reviewers should not reject articles without arguments, nor accept articles without checking that the submitted articles are written following the appropriate elements of the methodology that guarantee impartiality and proper application of statistics, all in order to reach the scientific truth in medicine. Besides, looking/checking is journal potentially deposited on Beall's list.

Regarding Copyright rules and necessary documents which every author and co-authors need to signed and deposit during the submission of their papers on the websites of the journals, publishers and authors have different opinions: that their upload does not qualify as infringement. Some have variously stated that their content was the subject of a rights buyout and is now open access, the content has passed its embargo period, or the content cannot be restricted because it is a government-created work. Others have an opinion that they never signed copyright transfer agreements and

that therefore they still own their works. But, if we want to miss problems like it was described in this text, the author must strictly follow rules of IJCME, EASE, COPE, Sarajevo Declaration on Integrity and Visibility of Scholarly Journals and sign all necessary documents which will prove that the presented content and results written in the submitted paper are legal and fully protected with appropriate bodies in academic or scientific institutions were author work and executed their investigation and research.

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