



## Letter to the Editor:

## Predatory Practices and How to Circumvent Them: a Viewpoint from India

Vinod Ravindran,<sup>1</sup> Durga Prasanna Misra,<sup>2</sup> and Vir Singh Negi<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Centre for Rheumatology, Calicut, Kerala, India; <sup>2</sup>Department of Clinical Immunology, Jawaharlal Institute of Postgraduate Medical Education and Research, Puducherry, India

Dear Editor-in-Chief,

We read with great interest the articles on predatory practices by Beall (1) and Gasparian et al. (2). As editors and editorial board members of the *Indian Journal of Rheumatology*, which is the official organ of the Indian Rheumatology Association, we would like to share our viewpoint and highlight the peculiar Indian context.

As detailed in aforementioned articles (1,2), 'predatory publishing practices' are driven by the pressure to publish more without due attention to the quality of the published work. Such practices may stem from various reasons. One such reason is the need to publish to gain promotions in tenure jobs. This is exemplified in a recent directive from the Medical Council of India, which is the regulatory body for medical professionals in India (3). This topical issue has been subsequently discussed by the Indian Association of Medical Journal Editors (IAMJE) (4). The aforementioned guidelines require a certain number of articles to be published by faculty members in medical colleges in India to be eligible for academic promotions. However, these guidelines ignore the current landscape of collaborative multi-center work by insisting on first- and second-author publications to be counted for promotions. Also, inclusion of indexing agencies of doubtful veracity such as Index Copernicus, which indexes many of the 'predatory' journals and inadvertently pushes authors to publish in 'soft' but poor quality journals, is lamentable.

Culturally, personal experience suggests that people in the Indian subcontinent do not consider criticism helpful, even if it is constructive. Hence, peer review is often misunderstood as a "barrier" towards the ultimate goal of publishing. Predatory practices conveniently feed on this psyche. Clinicians do not pass courses on good publishing practices and peer review during

their graduate studies in the existing curricula. There is a need to educate them in developing countries about these issues, and the *Journal of Korean Medical Science* is a trendsetter in this field for Asian journals with its Section on Editing, Writing and Publishing. There is also a need to conduct publication workshops to educate clinicians about ethical publishing practices. The *Indian Journal of Rheumatology* now conducts regular regional meetings (2–3 times per year) on publication and scientific writing. Our experience suggests that such workshops are helpful for young authors in terms of acquiring science writing, reviewing and publishing skills. This would translate to preventing them becoming victims of predatory journals.

As highlighted in another recent article (5), selecting an appropriate journal without falling foul of predatory practices is a daunting task. Our suggestion to young inexperienced authors would be to seek publication in journals that are published or endorsed by prestigious national or international societies, or those that have stood the test of time. Here, senior authors have to play a mentoring role in identifying appropriate journals for articles authored by their junior colleagues, inculcating good ethical and publication practices in the process. Also, journal editors all over the world should actively discourage citing predatory journals and encourage their peers to adhere to the latest ethics statements (6).

Sadly, nearly a sixth of the authors in predatory open-access journals are Indians (2). We highlight a modality of open-access publishing which has been adopted by the *Indian Journal of Rheumatology* and which can serve as a model towards open science at minimum or no cost to the authors. Publishing journals is a cumbersome and costly task. At our journal, the costs for publishing are covered by the Indian Rheumatology Association with a small contribution from nominal subscription charges for the print version. Hence, papers which are accepted and published are free to be viewed and downloaded at the journal's website irrespective of their affiliation or geographical location. Other examples of similar models are the *Journal of the Association of Physicians of India* and the *Journal of Postgraduate Medicine*.

The practice of medicine in general, and rheumatology in particular, requires Indian doctors to attend to huge numbers of patients everyday with limited, sometimes non-existent resources at their disposal. In spite of this, we draw attention towards the volume of the quality scientific work published from India in rheumatology as presented in our recent paper in the journal (7). Despite several challenges, including lack of time and financial resources, it is the passion to teach and disseminate knowledge that drives many clinicians to do research. Open-

access publishing is a boon to clinical researcher provided it is managed by reputed publishers, acquiring financial resources from a professional society or a trust for the betterment of science without compromising good research practices and peer review.

## DISCLOSURE

The authors have no potential conflicts of interest to disclose.

## AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION

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## ORCID

Vinod Ravindran <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-5842-1877>

Durga Prasanna Misra <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-5035-7396>

Vir Singh Negi <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-1518-6031>

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**Durga Prasanna Misra, MD**

Department of Clinical Immunology, Jawaharlal Institute of Postgraduate Medical Education and Research, Puducherry, 605006, India  
E-mail: [durgapmisra@gmail.com](mailto:durgapmisra@gmail.com)