

**EDITORIAL**

## Fake news. Fake journals. Fake conferences. What we can do

It is time to take the gloves off in the fight against predatory publishers, predatory journals and the ever-increasing number of predatory conferences. There was a time when I believed that education and awareness, coupled with some basic policy “signals,” would be enough to bring most Universities and Schools of Nursing & Midwifery to the table (Darbyshire, McKenna, Lee, & East, 2016). It is quite touching that I could still be this naive at my age.

Instead, while some notable Schools have acted against the predators to deny them their funds, the vast majority have chosen to ignore the problem and have done virtually nothing (Watson, 2017). This is irresponsibility at a mind-numbing level and now, in 2017, given what we know about predatory publishers and their metastases, this is no longer “ignorance,” it is collusion with academic fraud. Do these Schools and Universities have policies dealing with academic fraud? Of course they do. Do they have “guidelines” by the drawerful on plagiarism? Naturally. Would they frown on their staff or students buying or selling fake degrees or essays? You bet. However, no action whatever seems to follow staff or students who publish with predators or who request taxpayer “funding support” to present their work at the latest scam conference.

In an era of fake news and alternative facts, it is difficult to know where to even start here. The case against predatory publishers and our knowledge of their shady practices mean that there is no “jury out” on this issue at all. Put bluntly, these are crooks and conmen, money launderers, cybercriminals, forgers, identity thieves and possibly more (see, e.g., Dadkhah (2015); Dadkhah, Maliszewski, and Jazi (2016); Djuric, 2015). They represent what one commentator called “academic racketeering” (Truth, 2012). We know more than enough about how predatory publishers operate (Anon, 2017; Owens, 2015; Spears, 2015); their duplicity, journal hijacking, identity theft for “editorial boards,” impact factor faking and more and that they are about as genuine as a \$9 note.

Those are only the more overt shady practices involved. The damage that the predators cause to the much broader “world of science” and to our notions of academic freedom, information sharing, knowledge generation and translation and collegial connection may be even greater (Barroga, 2015; Beall, 2012, 2016; Beninger, Beall, & Shumway, 2016; International Academy of Nursing Editors “Predatory Publishing Practices” Collaborative, 2015; Moher & Moher, 2016).

There is an argument that novice researchers, unwary higher degree students and over-eager new academics may be easily duped by the predators and their slick operations and are thus less blameworthy. They may be quite unaware of the damage that such publishing may do to their developing academic credibility and careers. For example, many predators will insist that you sign over full

copyright to them and even masters and PhD students have been targeted by “troll publishers” to acquire their full theses (Bond University, 2015; Stromberg, 2014). When your work is owned by a predatory publisher, you are essentially powerless regarding what may happen to it or be done with it in the future.

It is much less easy to be forgiving of senior academics and even professors who assuredly should know better. I almost despair of the “big name nursing professors” whose papers appear in these scam journals. The work is usually their students’ and I am left wondering what kind of supervision and mentoring is happening here that would allow a student to have so little respect for their own work that they would sign it over to such shysters for the sake of a quick publication. The even more unpalatable thought is that some supervisors and students know exactly what is going on here and tacitly support it through a particularly “ugly symbiosis” (Kolata, 2017).

This is not exaggeration. It is almost impossible to overstate just how awful these “journals” and “conferences” are or to describe the depth of their non-existent standards. I could point to the endless “sting” operations that show how literally “anything” will be published or accepted as a conference paper by a predator. My favourites include the vast corpus of Ike Antare’s work that has earned him an H-index of 94 – higher than Einstein (Labbe, 2010). Pity Ike doesn’t actually exist. Then, there is the legendary conference paper composed of nothing at all but the words “Get Me Off Your Fucking Mailing List” that was accepted for a computing conference and subsequently accepted again by a predatory journal (Anon, 2010). Hard to beat though, was Health Policy Professor Mike Daube who had his dog Ollie submit a paper (Wilcken, 2017) that was of course accepted without pause. (Sorry). Ollie was even sent another paper to review and now sits, very obediently apparently, on several predator editorial boards.

The host of scam nursing journals out there are no better. Among their common practices are hijacking the names or webpages of genuine journals, copying photographs and biodetails of academics from their university webpage and pasting these into their own scam journal “Editorial Board” page. It’s a sobering thought and far more common than many academics realise, that you may be “out there” looking as if you support these con artists and be completely unaware of it (see, e.g., Williams, 2015). You may be the editor of a fake journal, be a keynote speaker at scam conferences or be chairing an important panel discussion—all without your knowledge. If you ever doubt the wisdom of googling yourself, don’t. Just do it.

Still think predatory journals can’t be that bad? Try this, from a paper published in *Journal of Nursing and Health Sciences* (If that title

looks familiar, that is not a mistake. Nursing and Health Sciences is the legitimate Wiley journal that the predator is trying to “hijack” (Dadkhah et al., 2016; Günaydin & Doğan, 2015). The paper is called: “Nursing a Profession or an Occupation” and seems to have been written by a random text generator. Here is a sample of the horror. There will be no formal reference cited. Google it if you must:

*“In an immaculate nursing practice “Every single restorative guardian must use splendid correspondence and interpersonal capacities and their correspondences ought to reliably be shielded, intense sympathetic and respectful” [4]. The test all medical attendants confront today is the way to interface both the work that needs to be done and the professional part of nursing. (...) Formal reflection on take a shot at, inspecting the event that happened and copying it using the advantages available allows as a piece of propelling the professional improvement and capacity in Nursing Profession [5]. Restorative specialists are the greatest social event of wellbeing professional's speaking to 50% of the entire wellbeing workforce. Working in the nation circumstances is a test obliging chaperons to be multi-skilled which shows that nursing a profession rather than an occupation.”*

But savour this sentence, “Nursing incorporates the advancement of wellbeing, aversion of disease and the consideration of not well, handicapped and kicking the bucket individuals.” Palliative care may never recover. That is the kind of “journal” that some Schools are allowing their faculty and students to publish in, no doubt while trumpeting how world class their excellence is.

Predatory conferences (Harbison, 2013; Pai & Franco, 2017) may be even worse. Reports abound of well-meaning academics who have been delighted that their abstract has been accepted for that prestigious “International Conference” that they saw online or that appeared as an obsequious invite in their email box. With generous University funding support, off they go, only to realise that the “conference” is a kind of Alan Partridge nightmare where there may be no more than ten or twenty people, all “presenters” and all from wildly diverse areas of interest (Anon, 2017). This isn't a “conference” it's a collision of random people who've been scammed out of a registration fee (Cohen, 2015).

Staff and students need to do good “due diligence” here and a bit of detective work.

But this is no longer a “problem” just for individual academics and students. The predators have discovered the perfect “business model.” There are thousands of academics desperate to “publish” quickly lest they “perish.” The push for “research outcomes” has made some academics so desperate that they will publish or speak anywhere, just so long as it can lengthen their CV and perhaps have their School fund them a nice week in an exotic location at the same time. The quality may have been rock-bottom among the entire 20 “conference participants,” but that “Presented invited plenary paper at World International Nursing Expert Leaders Summit

Conference in the Bahamas” CV entry still looks great. The predators will never stop so long as this money keeps flowing into their accounts.

We have to close off the “supply side” somehow by making the very idea of publishing with a predator or speaking at one of their non-events the moral and professional equivalent of plagiarism or any other kind of serious academic fraud. If every student and academic knew for certain that NONE of their unreviewed papers or conference presentations would count AT ALL in any sphere of academia and indeed if such “work” was treated with the contempt that plagiarism or other frauds merited, or even that it constituted a disciplinary offence, then we may just see a drying up of submissions heading the predators' way.

This is a wake-up call to Deans, Heads of School and Research Directors worldwide. The questions are as simple as they are confronting:

1. Are you prepared to have your School's standards of scholarship benchmarked at the level of predators and their outlets?
2. Are you happy to divert taxpayers' money via your faculty and students into the coffers of predators?
3. Will you accept any form of “publication” or “conference output,” regardless of the review and evaluation process, as evidence of research and scholarly quality?
4. Will you readily explain to research and higher degree students that their early “track records” can be established in journals and conferences that will unquestionably accept anything at all?
5. When you are called to account to defend your academic integrity and that of your School, in the face of evidence of repeated predatory publishing and presenting, what will you say?
6. Is it reasonable or commonplace at your School or University that promotions and academic credibility are determined in part by the predatory publications and presentations listed on applicants' CVs?

Some actions that research and academic leaders could put in place are as follows:

1. Deciding their school will not fund or support ANY activities involving predatory journal publishers or their conferences. There will be no funding support to pay scam article “fees” or scam conference registration, travel or accommodation.
2. Faculty or students who knowingly publish or present with predatory publishers can expect to be investigated for academic fraud.
3. Expecting faculty and students to remove any predatory publications or presentations from their CVs, university web pages, etc.
4. Faculty who find themselves acting in any capacity on predatory journal or conference “boards” will take every measure possible to remove themselves.
5. Research and Higher Degree students will be told that citing predatory publications as legitimate work in their essays and theses is unacceptable.
6. Expecting students and staff to do the required “predator check due diligence” prior to any submission of work for publication or

presentation and providing the necessary information and education to help them do this.

7. Combatting predatory publishers and conferences will be an explicit element of every Research Director's or Research Head's position and performance expectation.

We won't beat the predators overnight but as a nursing and midwifery community, every one of us has to start trying. That means our Research and School leaders and Research and Scholarship standards committees stepping up and taking action NOW, not in 5 years time when we have nothing left to defend.

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