



National Institutes of Health (NIH)-Funded Research: Do Authors Always Publish in Reputable Journals?

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Objectives

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) released “**NOT-OD-18-011: Statement on Article Publication Resulting from NIH Funded Research**” on 11/03/2017 to provide recommendations for identifying reputable journals. This study will determine if this guidance is sufficient for avoiding possibly predatory journals. NIH-funded research articles from our institution that do not adhere to the recommendations will be identified and their publishers/journals characterized.

Methods

A 11/08/2019 Legacy PubMed search identified 3,313 journal articles by authors from our institution that were published after 11/03/2017 and not indexed in MEDLINE. The citations were transferred to EndNote, where 1,572 records containing PMCIDs were isolated. These records were exported into Excel where the list was consolidated into 553 unique journal titles. The MEDLINE indexing status for each of these titles was verified in the NLM Catalog, generating a list of 42 journals that were not currently indexed in MEDLINE and not fully indexed in PubMed (i.e. citations selectively added to PubMed via deposit in PubMed Central). Additional data on these journals were gathered, including status/inclusion in such tools as Journal Citation Reports, PubsHub, Ulrichsweb, SCImago, Scopus/CiteScore, DOAJ, NLM Catalog, and attributes/characteristics specified in the NIH guidance for determining their credibility. Twelve journals were identified as being potentially predatory.

Figure 1. Literature Search and Evaluation Flow Diagram



Results

All twelve journals were fully open access but without records in DOAJ. Of the tools referenced for inclusion as a sign of credibility, Ulrichsweb indexed six of the journals, and seven journals provided DOIs. Nine journals had existed five years or less, while only four had more than five article records in PubMed. All journals provided publisher contact information, however, four did not provide details about the peer review process, three were not clear about fees charged, and four offered a refund/withdrawal policy. Although none of the publishers were members of COPE or OASPA, three of the journals had editorial board members from our institution (of the four editors contacted, two attested to credibility).

Conclusions

Classifying publishers/journals as predatory is difficult despite efforts to develop a universal definition. Checklists help characterize attributes but are limited in usefulness, as predatory journal websites can appear reputable by including these attributes and just-launched journals may appear predatory due to being new. Instead of relying solely on checklists, libraries could better support journal evaluation efforts by engaging early career authors with what journal attributes benefit their research (e.g. article discoverability/impact) and expanding their awareness of open access journals that deliver better value.

Figure 2. Graphic from the Think. Check. Submit. Initiative



NOT-OD-18-011 noted existing resources as guidance for researchers amongst its recommendations, including Think. Check. Submit.

The Check portion of this initiative includes a check list that can be referenced by an author to assess if a journal or publisher can be trusted.

The check list as written can be accessed via: <https://thinkchecksubmit.org/sample-page/check/>

Data fields from this tool were used in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Check List to Assess the Journal or Publisher

Table with 10 columns: Fully OA, Can you easily identify and contact the publisher?, Is the journal clear about the type of peer review it uses?, Are articles indexed in services that you use? (PubMed & MEDLINE), Is it clear what fees will be charged?, Is there a withdrawal/refund policy?, Do you recognise the editorial board? (Any from local institution?), and Is the publisher a member of a recognized industry initiative? (COPE, DOAJ, OASPA). The table contains 12 rows of data.

References

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