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“Fake,” “Predatory,” and “Pseudo” Journals: Charlatans Threatening Trust in Science

When trust is diminished, the scientific enterprise itself is threatened. The International Committee of

Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE) is concerned by the growing number of entities that are advertising themselves as “scholarly medical journals” yet do not function as such. These “fake,” “predatory,” or “pseudo” journals misrepresent their peer-review and publication processes. These journals accept and publish almost all submissions, are not transparent about article processing (or publication) fees, often mimic the names and formats of legitimate journals to mislead authors and readers, and may collect fees but never publish the accepted work. In short, they subvert the peer-review publication system for the sole purpose of making money. In so doing, they threaten to erode the trust central to peer review and diminish confidence in the scientific record.

Unfortunately, there remains no validated mechanism to reliably define or identify fake, predatory, or pseudo journals, and we therefore emphasize the need to evaluate each journal's practices carefully (www.icmje.org/recommendations/browse/roles-and-responsibilities/responsibilities-in-the-submission-and-peer-review-process.html). Researchers and readers must be aware of the existence of fake, predatory, or pseudo journals and avoid submitting research to them for publication or citing their content. Authors have a responsibility to evaluate the integrity, history, practices, and reputation of the journals to which they submit manuscripts. Guidance from various organizations is available to help identify the characteristics of reputable peer-review journals (www.wame.org/identifying-predatory-or-pseudo-journals). Seeking the assistance of scientific mentors, senior colleagues, and others with many years of scholarly publishing experience may also be helpful.

Our Web site includes a list of journals whose editors or publishers have contacted the ICMJE to request being listed as a journal that reports following the ICMJE's *Recommendations for the Conduct, Reporting, Editing and Publication of Scholarly Work in Medical Journals* (www.icmje.org/journals-following-the-icmje-recommendations/). Editors whose journals have requested inclusion on this list by indicating that they follow the ICMJE Recommendations must be mindful of their responsibility to do so. Although we believe that most editors take this responsibility seriously and strive to achieve high standards, it is possible that fake, predatory, or pseudo journals might request listing merely to gain the appearance of legitimacy. As noted above, no reliable means of identifying the bad without harming the good is available. Although the journals included on this list are not “members” of the ICMJE itself, nor does their inclusion indicate “certification” by the ICMJE, we hope that its maintenance may help to promote improvements in the quality of medical science and its reporting by indicating the standards many editors indicate they work to uphold. Moreover, it may serve as a public declaration to which the community may point when questions arise regarding whether a journal is following the standards it says it upholds.

Charlatans have long taken advantage of people's trust as a means to quick financial gain. We need to be mindful that they are among us. Our communal determination to avoid engaging these charlatans will diminish the financial incentive the drives them. In doing so, we can all help to strengthen and preserve the trust that is central to science and medicine.

The ICMJE

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