Author Beware!

Yes, Virginia, you can get published! In 1897, the New York Sun published a letter to the editor asking if there really was a Santa Claus (Daily News, 2015). The Sun responded with an editorial that is as famous as the letter. The most famous words within that editorial, of course, were “Yes, Virginia, there is a Santa Claus.” And just like that letter, an editor today can almost guarantee that anyone can be published—but it may not be in a journal you would want listed on your resume.

Predatory publishers abound! The most recent statistics from Jeffrey Beall indicate that the number of predatory publishers has grown from 23 in 2012 to 693 currently (Beall, 2015). However, the good news in that current number is that it represents all fields and includes “potential, possible, or probable” (Beall, 2015, para. 1) predatory publishers. Even if we could eliminate some publishers’ names because they really weren’t predatory in nature, that still is a lot of publications that could lead authors astray.

What is a predatory publication? First, let’s look at the idea of open-access publishers. Open access means that a publisher would charge a fee for peer review, editing, or release on a website. Many reputable publishers provide this service. Some provide an early-release option so that work can become readily available to others, but early release is made only after the manuscript has gone through the standard peer review and editing processes. What makes a publisher predatory is the exploitation of an author by asking for the fee and then simply publishing the article—without peer review or editing support.

How can authors know whether a publisher is a predator? One of the clues is when an e-mail solicitation requests submission of a manuscript on a broad topic. An e-mail from a nursing journal such as The Journal of Continuing Education in Nursing, for example, might ask you to submit a manuscript on some topic related to continuing education or professional development. Generally, a broad-based solicitation could indicate that the publisher knows nothing about your work or interests and is basically “trolling” to find someone to take the offer. Checking the journal’s website may or may not be helpful. Sometimes the editorial board comprises individuals who have not published in the field, are from areas of the world unfamiliar to you, or cannot be found through general online searches. (In the interest of full disclosure, I agreed to serve on one journal’s editorial board because several distinguished nurses were listed as members of the board. None of us is affiliated with the publisher any longer.) Perhaps the simplest way to determine whether a journal may be predatory is to read Jeffrey Beall’s blog or access the Directory of Open Access Journals (http://www.doaj.org) or the Open Access Scholarly Publishers Association (http://www.oaspa.org). The most comprehensive list of nursing journal publications can be found through Nurse Author & Editor (http://nursingeditors.com/journals-directory). Remember, however, that open access does not equal predatory journals, so Beall’s blog is probably the easiest way to determine if a journal might be viewed as predatory.

How do these predatory publishers continue to thrive? First, they present themselves as legitimate. They often have an impressive address and attach logos of “affiliated” groups. Second, they have a list of editorial board members who may or may not be experts in the field. Third, they solicit through mass e-mails, which are generic enough to include whatever an author might be contemplating. Finally, sometimes the fees aren’t clear and may not be presented until after the manuscript becomes a published paper.

So, yes, Virginia, you can get published. The question is in which journal!

REFERENCES


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