If we take the broad definition of the word publication, we can include speeches and posters. They are forms of making something public. Predatory publications, the written form, have become a major concern in recent years because of the rapid proliferation we have experienced in many disciplines. The conference version of predatory publications is an unexplored field.

Today, when I opened my e-mail, I found that I was a recognized leader in subject “X.” This was a surprise to me! Let’s say that X represents brain surgery. I am choosing a really unlikely topic because it will make clear how I came to the conclusion that the conference was every bit as much a predatory type as are the journals that have proliferated in recent years.

Somewhere in my history, I used words that a predatory conference planner saw associated with my name. Therefore, I was now invited to come be a speaker because the planners decided my “expertise [i.e., the hypothetical brain surgery] would be an excellent fit for” the Nursing Orthopedics Conference 2017 (i.e., a title I made up). Did you note that my expertise has nothing to do with the topic of the conference itself? I was specifically invited to come to provide my valuable content to people who wanted to hear me because I was an expert in this area. I instantly saw the relationship to some of the predatory journal solicitations that I think of as send-brain opportunities. In other words, “You have some ideas, we are looking for speakers, do whatever you want.”

Having heard a nursing leader (who served as a spy at one of these types of conferences), I knew that the potential was there to prey on nurses who are seeking presentation opportunities. My spy colleague reported that the conference she reviewed had almost as many presenters as people in attendance. Imagine creating a presentation that you perceived to be for a major conference only to find relatively few participants.

Many predatory conferences use titles that suggest national or international audiences that are ongoing by including the year. The specific conference in this e-mail was over 25 years old! And yet, neither I nor the few colleagues I asked had ever heard of this group or the conference.

I checked the information for the planning committee and found several U.S. nurse leaders engaged with this group. That is similar to what many predatory journals do. In the nature of full disclosure, several years ago I agreed to serve on the board of an open access journal, which turned out to be a predatory publication. I am no longer on that board!

As with predatory journals, the language in the e-mail is often not standard English. Words are missing or are misused. The objectives are often vague or global, and even when a theme is presented, the content does not always relate. My specific e-mail offered the opportunity to click on a hyperlink if I wanted to attend as a speaker/delegate.

Another hyperlink in the e-mail provided a connection to download the brochure. However, to access the brochure, I would have had to complete a form that included my name, street address, e-mail address, and telephone number before I could see the brochure. Therefore, I cannot tell you who the speakers were who had already committed because I did not want to encourage further e-mails.

Do you have experiences with these kinds of conferences? We would love to hear your view. Meanwhile, caveat emptor—let the buyer beware!