



Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Journal of Ayurveda and Integrative Medicine

journal homepage: <http://elsevier.com/locate/jaim>

Editorial

Indian Science and Predatory Journals

1. Tribute to Beall's efforts

As we enter the year 2017, the desperation to publish trash science seems to have reached to new heights. It is very disappointing that just in the beginning of the year Beall's List of "potential, possible, or probable predatory" publishers and journals has mysteriously disappeared from his website. Jeffrey Beall repeatedly pointed out that the predatory journals are threatening the credibility of science by undermining peer review. He raised voice against predatory publishers who are polluting the scientific literature with fringe or junk science. Beall rightly suggested that any responsible University and college should not consider such dubious journals for academic performance. He further appealed that researchers and respectable journals should not cite articles from predatory journals, and academic library databases should exclude metadata for such publications [1]. But sadly, early this year Beall had to take a "personal decision" to take down his list. J-AIM salutes his contributions to recognize outstanding service that upheld sanctity and ethics in scientific publishing.

2. Criterion for journal

Research publications carry substantial weight in Indian universities for faculty selection, promotions, increment. Academic performance index (API) is advised as an appraisal indicator by the University Grants Commission (UGC) of India. Good API scores are required for career advancement and promotions. Many Universities have mandatory provision for certain number of publications even before submitting PhD thesis and to get recognition as PhD guide. While these provisions are well intended they negate fundamentals of research by compelling publications. Furthermore, the absence of clarity on what should be considered as a 'research publication' remains the root cause of desperation to publish by any means. The UGC guidelines had indicated ISSN number as a criterion for a research Journal. This indeed was a big mistake because "International Standard Serial Number" (ISSN) number is used to identify newspapers, journals, magazines and all kinds of periodicals – print and electronic media. These numbers are mainly for identification through bar code and library classification, ordering and distribution purpose. ISSN numbers are necessary for administration and logistics purposes, however they do not reflect quality of any journal, periodical or monograph.

Peer review under responsibility of Transdisciplinary University, Bangalore.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jaim.2017.02.004>

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3. Publication ethics

J-AIM had raised the issue of publication ethics in 2013 through an editorial 'Ethical and scientific aspects' of research publications [2]. Savitribai Phule Pune University was one of the first to issue caution against publishing in dubious journals and framed "Guidelines for Research Publications". These guidelines were adopted by few other Indian Universities as well. Unfortunately, the overall situation in India has only deteriorated over last decade despite few such affirmative efforts.

The desperation to publish and temptation to find short cuts have compromised publication ethics and adversely affected quality of publications. The Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) as a forum of editors and publishers of peer review journals promotes integrity in research publications. COPE guidance and tutorials are valuable to promote publication ethics among faculty and students. COPE guidelines for authors, editors and publishers are available at www.publicationethics.org. These guidelines stress ethical and responsible research, compliance to relevant guidelines, transparent presentation of results, honesty, and avoiding plagiarism, fabrication, falsification or data manipulation. Avoiding temptation of splitting data or using contents in parts to increase number of papers from same data (salami slicing). Researchers should describe their methods with clarity and detailing so that their findings can be confirmed by others. Authors should submit only original work that is not plagiarized, nor published elsewhere.

4. The UGC efforts

Recent articles in Current Science and Science, discuss how image of Indian Science is tarnished because of publications in predatory journals [3,4]. It is indeed very disturbing to note that many bogus journals are published from India and submissions to such dubious journals are also from Indian academia. It has been reported that most authors in predatory journals are from developing countries [5]. The predatory journals have rapidly increased their publication volume from 53,000 in 2010 to 420,000 articles in 2014, published by around 8000 active journals with an average fee of 178 USD [6]. Thus, predatory publishing has become a big industry luring gullible authors from countries like India.

To prevent such malpractices, recently, the University Grants Commission (UGC) has released a list of approved Journals. While this is a welcome step, there are many lacunae. First, the UGC list includes journals from Indian Citation Index (ICI-a questionable private subscription based database), which enlists many predatory

journals. As a result, the UGC list includes many predatory journals. Many good journals indexed in PubMed are not included in the UGC list. This may be detrimental to the reputation of the UGC and Indian academia. Rather than issuing a list of approved journals it may be better to approve list of credible indexing agencies. Of course, different disciplines may have different indexing agencies and databases.

Ideally, the judgment regarding research article should be made based on the quality of work rather than status of the Journal. The San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA) provides a set of recommendations regarding assessment of individuals and institutions, without emphasizing the impact factor <http://am.ascb.org/dora/>. DORA recommendation suggests that while evaluating research performance, the focus should be on scientific content rather than publication metrics. However, for practical purposes quality and reputation of peer reviewed Journal is taken as one of the criteria for judging the reliability of academic publications.

The success of any journal is measured primarily based on adherence to publication ethics, reputation of the editorial board, transparent editorial policies, quality of peer review, global readership and the number of citations. Several indicators like Impact Factor, Source Normalized Impact per Paper (SNIP), Scimago Journal Ranking (SJR), CiteScore and h-Index are commonly used for Journal ranking. None of these can serve as a foolproof metric. To add to confusion, many spurious agencies giving fraud impact factors have emerged in last few years. More recent comprehensive metrics known as Altmetric captures activity from social media like Twitter, Facebook, science blogs, mainstream news, and such other sources. Altmetric score indicates impact of a particular research, intervention, concept or idea on the society. It is becoming increasingly clear that the outcome of any research, development and analysis should benefit not only to the sector but also to the society for the global good. We hope that the UGC takes due cognizance and revises its present approved list more dynamic to exclude dubious journals and maintain uncompromising standards in Indian academia.

5. J-AIM editorials

The intent of any good editorial is to bring key issues on discussion table. The editorials are expected to be factual, informative,

impartial, analytical and thought provoking. Editorials should empower readers to draw their own conclusions. Editorials need to be inspiring, balanced, honest, adventurous and crusading. They should help stakeholders and policy makers not just to identify key issues and concerns but also provide pointers towards resolves. Editorials reflect ethos and value systems of respective journals.

Right from the beginning, J-AIM editorials have tried to address variety of issues related to knowledge, history, quality, regulations, planning and policy to help transformation of AYUSH sector. All these years, I have been writing editorials in the capacity of Editor-in-Chief. I have taken help of editorial colleagues and have ensured that all editorials are also peer reviewed. J-AIM is blessed with many senior advisors and dedicated team of young Associate Editors who would be formally involved in the future editorials. Through this 30th editorial, I reassure that J-AIM legacy of quality, professionalism and ethics shall continue. Let's work together for transformation of AYUSH sector through ethical and quality research publications.

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