

“Greetings for the day!” Unsolicited e-mails from questionable journals

For some years now, people working in science have been confronted with a new phenomenon: The annoyance caused by (exclusively English-language) e-mails in which the recipients are asked – usually after a friendly greeting (Tab. 1) – to publish an article in a journal mentioned in the mail (Tab. 2). The titles of these journals are largely unknown in the dental/medical world. Sometimes they resemble those of renowned specialist journals.

In order to demonstrate the extent to which this practice has taken on, the e-mails of this kind received by the first author at his address <jens.tuerp@unibas.ch> between 1 and 31 January 2020 were stored and analyzed.

Results

Eighty-seven mails were received, i.e. almost 3 per day. They referred to 60 different titles of journals in which one may publish. Without exception, these were online journals. Thirty-seven journals are devoted to medicine, two cover the humanities and social sciences, one specializes in crustaceans, and one is multidisciplinary (Tab. 3).

Only 19 of the 60 journals were devoted to dentistry (Tab. 4). None of these are listed in PubMed or the Directory of Open Access Journals. It can be assumed that these 19 journals, like their publishers (Tab. 4), are unknown in the dental profession.

The 87 mails include 7 general enquiries from 5 publishers, each of

which provides a large range of journals. Four of these publishers are based in India (Green Publication; IP Innovative Publication; IJRDO; NN Publication), one in England (Cambridge Scholars).

While most requests were only sent once, 10 journal titles and one publisher were characterized by repeated mailings (Tab. 5). The journals that requested the most and third most frequently had no reference to dentistry at all (sociology; crustaceans).

The primary aim of most senders was apparently to make the journal or publisher known to the recipient and to promote occasional consideration when submitting an article. In other, sometimes follow-up e-mails the desire

Formulation
“Greetings!!”
“Greetings for the day!!!”
“Hope you are doing well.”
“I hope you are doing great.”
“Warm wishes to you!”

Table 1 Typical formulations at the beginning of the mails.

Request
“We are inviting you to submit your research work it can be „Full Length or Short Length“ in our journal [...]”
“The [journal] is currently accepting the manuscript for its peer review, open access publication.”
“We would like to encourage your gracious presence and your research group(s) to submit papers theme [xxx] at our esteemed Journals ...”
“We strongly encourage to venture in our [journal] given your great stature and knowledge in this arena.”
“We have gone through your huge profile online and it is very fascinating and inspiring.”
“With reference to your previous publications, we request you to contribute an article to our [journal].”
“It is our enormous pleasure to invite you to submit or recommend manuscript/papers of your research/review/study to [journal], a peer-reviewed and open access international academic journal publishes high quality and original research papers, reviews, and case studies related to all areas in Dentistry.”
“We gladly invite you to submit your work towards [journal].”

Table 2 Typical formulations (partly in incorrect English). Examples of e-mails received between 1 and 3 January 2020

to submit a manuscript as quickly as possible was at the forefront (Tab. 6).

Evaluation

The fact that only about 30 % of the journals had a dental background shows that the sending of these mails was undirected. Obviously, the editors and the publishers of these journals approve of the fact that authors from other fields also submit manuscripts to their journals (which are then published in almost all cases). This suggests that the quality of the content of such journals is as questionable as the strategy of the publishers behind them.

Since the mentioned journals, which are designed for a dental audience, are not listed in important electronic search engines, such as PubMed or Livivo, they remain unknown to the dental readership. It can therefore be assumed that the articles published in them are not taken note of by the scientific community, i.e. are neither read nor cited.

Overriding problem

It can further be assumed that the vast majority of these dubious journals and their publishers are so-called predatory journals and predatory publishers, respectively. They contribute to the current publication and communication crisis in research and science.

The systematic violations of the usual publication rules, as described in this article, have now reached such proportions that the scientific community can be expected to suffer considerable damage. Publications are a central element of the scientific community. They are indispensable for the presentation of research results and form the basis for scientific discourse. The undermining of quality standards by dubious publishing practices on the part of purely commercially oriented predatory publishers therefore has direct consequences: Important research results are published in unknown journals and consequently go unnoticed, discussions on content do not even take place or can be steered in the wrong direction, misinformation spreads, scientific careers are damaged – or (in exceptional cases, and then only for a short period of time) unjustifiably promoted. How

Titles of non-dental journals
Annals of Case Reports
Annals of Sports Medicine and Research
Anxiety and Depression Journal
Archives of Medical and Clinical Psychology
Canadian Journal of Biomedical Research and Technology
Clinical and Experimental Investigations
Clinics in Medical Sciences
Current Advances in Orthopaedics and Physical Therapy
Gerontology & Geriatric Research
Global Journal of Physiotherapy and Rehabilitation
International Journal of Humanities, Social Sciences and Education
International Journal of Reproductive Medicine and Sexual Health
International Research Journal of Medicine and Medical Sciences
Japan Journal of Research
Journal of Alzheimer's Parkinsonism & Dementia
Journal of Case Reports and Studies
Journal of Clinical and Medical Images
Journal of Modern Human Pathology
Journal of Neurological Disorders & Stroke
Journal of Neurology & Translational Neuroscience
Journal of Pharmacology and Clinical Toxicology
Journal of Radiology and Imaging
Journal of Radiology and Radiation Therapy
Journal of Surgery
JSM Sexual Medicine
Korea College of Rheumatology
Medical Science Monitor
Nauplius
Neurology and Neurobiology
Neurology and Neuroscience
Nursing & Healthcare Journal

Table 3 Continuation: The 41 journals not related to dentistry

Otorhinolaryngology and Hypersensitivity Treatment
RA Journal Of Applied Research
Scholarly Journal of Otolaryngology
SL Clinical Medicine: Research Journal
SM Gerontology and Geriatric Research
SM Journal of Orthopedics
Sociology Insights
Sports Medicine
Surgery & Case Studies: Open Access Journal
United Journal of Medicine and Health Care

Table 3 Continuation: The 41 journals not related to dentistry

Titles of dental journals	Publisher
American Journal of Dentistry and Oral Care	Onomy Science, India
Annals of Dental Science	MedRead, USA
Dental Oral Biology and Craniofacial Research	Science Repository, USA/Estonia
ES Journal of Dental Sciences	eScientific International Open Library, Australia
European Journal of Dental and Oral Health	European Open Access Publishing, Belgium
Global Journal of Oral Science	Green Publishers, Pakistan
International Journal of Dentistry and Oral Health	BioCore, USA
Interventions in Pediatric Dentistry Open Access Journal	Lupine Publishers, USA
Journal of Dental and Maxillofacial Research	Research Open, Ireland
Journal of Dentistry Open Access	Science Repository, USA/Estonia
Journal of Oral Health and Dental Science	Scholarena, USA
JSM Dentistry	JSciMed Central, India
Modern Research in Dentistry	Crimson Publishers, USA
Online Journal of Dentistry & Oral Health	Iris Publishers, USA
Oral Health & Dental Science	Scivision Publishers, USA
SL Dentistry, Oral Disorders and Therapy	Scientific Literature, USA
Stechnolock Journal of Dentistry	Stechnolock, India
SVOA Dentistry	ScienceVolks, England
The Dentist	Medtext Publications, USA

Table 4 The 19 journals related to dentistry, and their publishers

harmful these negative structures actually are is difficult to quantify. However, the financial advantages of the providers involved can be estimated.

A new or unknown publication will be checked for its seriousness. An essential criterion for the selection decision is whether the publication organ has established its own guidelines for good scientific practice."

German Research Foundation 2019 [1] p. 21

A "glimpse into the box" was provided by the judgment of the US Federal Trade Commission (FTC) responsible for consumer protection against OMICS Group Inc., iMedPub LLC, Conference Series LLC. This Indian company operates hundreds of dubious journals and also organizes a large number of international conferences. These activities are now considered to be an essential part of junk science (often referred to as "fake science"), characterized by worthless publications or conferences [6]. The injunction enforced in March 2019 by the U.S. District Court of Nevada against Omics to immediately stop the fraudulent business practices in the U.S. was accompanied by a fine of \$50.1 million.

The practice of predatory publishers must be seen as a frontal attack on the quality of research and science and, by extension, on the academic system, including industrial research, and must be taken seriously accordingly. The massive violations of the quality rules for publishing were made possible by the structural shifts in publishing operations towards so-called Open Access journals and the associated payment models.

In the traditional journal world, manuscripts containing the results of research projects were submitted by authors to academic journals, qualitatively reviewed there (with the help of external, often university-based reviewers) and printed upon successful completion of the peer review process. The corresponding journals were

Journal title	Number of mails
Sociology Insights	6
JSM Dentistry	5
Nauplius	4
ES Journal of Dental Sciences	3
NN Publication [Verlag]	3
Annals of Dental Science	2
International Journal of Dentistry and Oral Health	2
Journal of Dental and Maxillofacial Research	2
Journal of Neurology & Translational Neuroscience	2
Journal of Radiology and Imaging	2
Stechnolock Journal of Dentistry	2

Table 5 Sources of repeated requests (January 2020)

then accessible via subscriptions or libraries.

The Open Access movement gave rise to journals that were free of charge and freely accessible to every user. To achieve this, funding was shifted from readers to authors, thus completely turning the classical model on its head. Some of the best-known representatives in medicine are *PLOS Medicine* and *BMC Medicine*, in dentistry *BMC Oral Health* and *Head & Face Medicine*. They characterize themselves as open access/open peer review medical/dental journals. They originally took over the quality-preserving processes of the classic journals (e.g. qualitative peer review of incoming manuscripts) – except for the financing, and this is exactly where the problem and the gateway for the undesirable development by the predatory journals lies.

Whereas in the traditional model a high rejection rate of submissions (over 90 % in the case of journals such as *The Lancet*) was considered a sign of quality and thus also served as a quantity limit, this mechanism is missing in open access where the financial income of publishers depends exclusively on the number of released articles. It is therefore reasonable to assume that there is a strong temp-

tation to increase the number of articles and thus the income through lower quality requirements. This threat exists for all publishers – even serious ones. However, it has increasingly been systematically exploited by newly founded journals to fraudulently penetrate the journal market and to urge authors under systematic deception regarding the nature of their journals to publish in predatory journals. One means of doing this is to write to scientists by e-mail, as described in this article. Despite assertions to the contrary, there is no quality control of the content of submitted manuscripts; practically everything that is sent in is published.

One would think that science is critical and robust enough to resist these developments. But this is precisely not the case, as a study in Germany in July 2018 showed. *Norddeutscher Rundfunk* (Northern German Broadcasting), *Westdeutscher Rundfunk* (West German Broadcasting) and the Munich-based daily newspaper *Süddeutsche Zeitung* identified 5000 scientists from the established scientific community and from the health care sector who had published in such dubious journals. The reaction to this disclosure was limited, and it did not

seem to affect the scientific community in particular [2]. In Germany, interest was by no means as high as in the USA or India, for example.

The COVID-19 pandemic has created a completely new situation. Due to the large number of open questions about coronavirus disease that need to be answered scientifically, many research projects have been started within a very short period of time. This has resulted in a high number of publications. It seems, however, that the conditions of the pandemic have been accompanied by a loss of quality in science. One of the regularly criticized points is the peer review process, which has come to public attention with a bang following the withdrawal of articles by *The Lancet* [5] and the *New England Journal of Medicine* [4] on the treatment of COVID-19 with the anti-malarial drug chloroquine. Although these publication failures, which put the quality standards and credibility of science under massive pressure, have no direct connection to predatory journals, they do indirectly, because the hitherto deep quality gap between the two worlds – here: serious scientific journals, there: windy pseudo-journals – is becoming shallower. The personal observation of the authors of this article shows on the basis of the e-mails received that the activities of predatory journals continue unabated, now also in the corona environment [3].

Recommendations

Even if the possibility cannot be excluded that among the senders of unsolicited e-mails are some (albeit few) reputable publishers or journals, the recipients are generally well advised not to react to this type of mails. More and more (not only medical) faculties and institutions explicitly point out that publishing in these journals is contrary to the principles of good scientific practice. The following websites can be useful in this context:

- Wikipedia: Predatory publishing. <URL: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Predatory_publishing#Other_lists>
- Howard-Tilton Memorial Library, Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana, USA: Predatory Pub-

Specific request

"As we are planning to accomplish the Volume 3 Issue 5 by the end of January in our [journal], but we are in deficit of articles for this issue. Hence, we require your voluntary contribution at least 2500–4000 words of article based upon your research interest. I hope, 2page article will not a big task for distinguished people like you. Envisaging to have your precious manuscript by this weekend."

"Hence we have selected some eminent authors like you to support our journal. We kindly request you to submit any type of your manuscript towards our journal and help us to reach the target for our next issue."

"This is a follow up mail from the Editorial Office. We would be glad to know your opinion to submit your manuscript for the upcoming issue of the journal, so that we can plan accordingly to include it in the same."

"I know you are busy. So i wanted to reach back out about my earlier request-have you had a chance to review the invitation that i sent over a couple of weeks ago."

"We are in need of one article for successful release of Volume 4 Issue 4 by 4th February? Is it possible for you to support us with your 2 page opinion/case report or mini review, we hope 2 page article isn't time taken for eminent people like you. We hope you won't disappoint us. Acknowledge this email within 24hrs."

Table 6 Examples of time-bound requests (partly in incorrect English)

(Tab. 1–6: JC Türp)

lishers. A Guide. <URL: <https://predatoryjournals.com/journals/>>

- Think. Check. Submit. <URL: <https://thinkchecksubmit.org/>>
- Stop Predatory Journals: List of Predatory Journals. <URL: <https://predatoryjournals.com/journals/>>

If these hints are not followed, one may well end up like a French doctor and researcher from Marseille who wrote in frustration on 15 February 2020 on the social networking site ResearchGate:

*Dear all
wish I saw this earlier
we paid for the fees
and the paper appears nowhere else than
on their website
No answer to my emails
don't think it's possible to get the money
back*

References

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3. Prasad R: 'Paper' published in a predatory journal claims COVID-19 will end by mid-September. The Hindu 26.06.2020 (URL: <https://www.thehindu.com/sci-tech/health/paper-published-in-a-predatory-journal-claims-covid-19-will-end-by-mid-september/article31776526.ece>) (last access: July 8, 2020)

4. Rubin EJ: Expression of Concern: Mehra MR et al. Cardiovascular disease,

drug therapy, and mortality in Covid-19. N Engl J Med 2020; 382: e102

5. The Lancet Editors: Expression of concern: Hydroxychloroquine or chloroquine with or without a macrolide for treatment of COVID-19: a multinational registry analysis. Lancet 2020; 395: e102

6. Türp JC: "Once around the world ...". Unsolicited congress invitations via e-mail. Dtsch Zahnärztl Z Int 2020; 2: 56–61



(Photo Basliak, Basel)

**JENS C. TÜRP, DDS, DR MED DENT
PROFESSOR**

Department of Oral Health & Medicine
University Center for Dental Medicine
Mattenstrasse 40
CH-4058 Basel, Switzerland
jens.tuerp@unibas.ch



(Photo: University Medical Center Freiburg)

**GERD ANTES, DR RER NAT
PROFESSOR**

Former Director
German Cochrane Centre
Albert Ludwig University Freiburg
Breisacher Str. 153
D-79110 Freiburg
antes@cochrane.de

