Pressure to Publish: Index Copernicus and Predatory Journals are Helping (?) Academicians

Sir,

There are many senior professors who do not have a published journal article. Does this fade their glory? Not at all, in our opinion. The mandatory publication is a new-age concept in Indian academia. Medical Council of India (MCI) has fixed the criteria of minimum qualification for promotion based on publication, not research work.[1] What if the acceptance and publication of a manuscript need a long time? Promotion would be kept on hold?

MCI also fixed some indexing agencies in which journals should be indexed to be counted as legible publication. Among the agencies, there is an indexing agency, called “Index Copernicus (IC).” Many critics have described IC as dubious indexing agency and there is an ongoing discussion about its credibility.[2] We never read a review paper which collected literature from “Index Copernicus.” It contains a huge number (44,583) of journals indexed and the journal details can be found from their website. The numbers of total journals are increasing day by day. Figure 1 is the screenshot captured from IC website showing the number of journals indexed per country according to color density. India has the maximum number of journals (3978) which is 8.92% of the total indexed journals indexed in IC.[3] “Index Copernicus” and “Index Copernicus Value (ICV)” are two commonly used phrases in unsolicited email invitation sent to authors from predatory journals. For example, some of the screenshots taken from unsolicited emails of first author are presented in Figure 2. Another issue is about the online versus printed journals. MCI would not accept promotion if authors publish articles in online journal, whatever the reputation of the journal is.[4] In multidisciplinary research work, there is collaboration of experts from several departments with substantial contribution from each of the researchers. However, MCI would accept only first author and corresponding author for promotion.[5] This has reduced the number of accepted publications for many authors. And, this may be a reason why India is publishing in huge volume now.

There are journals, which have overactive editorial team and over-dedicated reviewers. These journals can process the articles within days, even hours, and provide acceptance letter within minutes. Obviously, this dedicated service is provided in exchange of money.[6] How they provide the service and how academician takes their service is explained briefly in the following cases.

Case 1: Associate professor “A” was aware about the minimum number of papers required for medical teachers for promotion. She was busy with conduct of undergraduate examination for the last month. However, the last date of application for promotion was knocking at the door. She needed one more paper for promotion. Fortunately (?), she found one journal indexed with IC which promises publication within 5 days. She hastily completed writing a manuscript, uploaded it online, and acceptance letter was received within a day. As the journal promised, the paper got published within 5 days. The total cost was 2500 Indian rupees (INR). Promotion application was accepted.

Case 2: The promotion application of assistant professor “B” was attached with two published papers which meet the minimum criteria. However, he was called by the scrutiny department on the last day of application and was informed that one of the journals where he published the paper has only electronic version indexed. Hence, application could not be processed further. They also informed that acceptance letter from a journal is also accepted for consideration for promotion. Immediately, he started searching on his laptop and found a half-finished manuscript and started writing the rest. He contacted a journal editor over telephone which has both online and print version indexed in IC and fixed the matter. The editor assured that after uploading the manuscript, immediately an acceptance letter would be issued if payment is done. At 5 pm, Dr. “B” emailed the manuscript and sent money by immediate payment service to the editor. The editor issued him an acceptance letter within a blink. Dr. “B” submitted it to the scrutinizer and application was accepted. The issuance of acceptance letter and the publication cost was only 1500 INR.

Case 3: A freshly passed postgraduate, Dr. “C,” prepared a case report and asked a colleague for information about a suitable journal for the case report. The colleague suggested a reputed journal. Dr. “C” then uploaded the article in the journal and it was reverted for a major revision with language edit directly from the editor’s desk. This may be
Letters to the Editor

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Letters to the Editor

We are happy to announce publication of Surgical Update: In International Journal of Surgery and Other Journals is Indexed with Indexed Copernicus, quarterly, Print & Online Society (registered under MP Society registration act, 197.)

Dear authors/ Faculty members & Post graduate student

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Dear Authors,

The Indian National Journal of Current Research (INJCR) ISSN: 0975-833X is a multidisciplinary peer-reviewed journal that focuses on the depth of current research across disciplines with the ultimate aim of improving current research. The journal is indexed with leading International Indexing agencies like Index Copernicus, Google Scholar, Open J Gate, IFS, Citefactor, DOI/DOAJ, DRJI, EYUP.

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First two cases are the scenario how academicians are getting relief from the pressure of publication for their timely promotion. However, the third case was beginning of a journey of publication with guidance of some helpful (?) colleague.

From these three cases, it is obvious that the predatory journal and its editors are no one to blame. They are indeed helping the authors. What if there are no so-called predatory journals? Promotion of Dr. “A” and Dr. “B” might get delayed another one or two years. Furthermore, affiliated institutes might lose its recognition for increased undergraduate seats. And, the young postgraduate Dr. “C” could not get gratification of publication in a journal within hours. Need from authors’ end is creating more journals. The journals, by sending impressive email invitation, are alluring authors and academicians who previously published in those journals are showing path of rapid publication to unpublished authors.

Elimination of this current era of dubious publication is only possible if authors act responsibly. First, authors need to know how to identify a questionable journal and how to avoid their alluring fast publication offers. A list of criteria to suspect a journal to be predatory can be found in a visual

Figure 2: Screenshots captured from the unsolicited emails received from questionable journals

a common experience for first time authors. After a week, when the colleague asked about the manuscript status, Dr. “C” explained the situation. As the manuscript was rejected from first journal, he was so depressed about the matter and consulted another colleague. That consultation showed him hope. The manuscript was sent to an IC indexed journal which accepted the manuscript within 2.5 hours. Only 1000 INR was charged as publication fees.

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Presentation by Hayward A in Editage.com.[7] An informed academician can help peers about realizing the disgraceful publication in predatory journals. When there will be no demand from authors, there will be no supply of predatory journals. However, stakeholders should consider providing training for conduct of research and publication, starting from graduate students to senior teachers. In addition, research activity should be promoted rather than pressure of publication. What if the time, infrastructure, and funds are not sufficient?

Financial support and sponsorship
Nil.

Conflicts of interest
There are no conflicts of interest.

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