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## Foot and Ankle Surgery

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## Editorial

## More than just another spam: Predatory emails to Foot &amp; Ankle Surgeons



Who does not like to get charming and flattering messages? Who would not feel honoured when his or her work is cited and even praised? An increasing number of researchers from all fields are reaching the impression that the volume of these messages is getting to be too much.

In a recent issue of *Fuss & Sprunggelenk*, the German Journal of Foot & Ankle Surgery, the burden of predatory article and congress requests was analysed for the first time from the junk email account of a foot and ankle surgeon [1]. Over a 5.5-year period, a more than 30-fold increase in predatory emails was found. Interestingly, only 2.3% of all email requests actually pertained to Foot and Ankle Surgery.

Over the recent month I have received a total of 321 predatory article requests and another 84 predatory congress invitations. This was an increase of 35% when compared to December 2018, just half a year ago [2] – although I did not answer a single one. Likewise, only 2.1% of them pertained to Foot & Ankle Surgery and only 38% to Orthopaedic, Trauma or General Surgery. In almost 20% there was an additional invitation to join the Honourable Editorial Board – another big compliment for the foot & ankle specialist, but maybe of not so much use for the scientific value of the inviting journal. This points to the heart of the matter:

It is not at all about quality. It is about making money.

Predatory journals are defined as journals (and publishers) that profit from scholarly publishing by charging for publications without thorough peer review [3]. These journals sprung up with the advent of open access and have grown substantially. They quickly made their way into orthopaedic surgery [4–7]. These journals offer rapid publication with “rigorous” peer review – mostly within 2 weeks of submission. The deadlines provided for submission are similarly short, mostly pretending that the actual issue is just lacking one article. It goes without saying that true scientific quality will not be achieved this way. Most of these emails get to the point rather quickly: the fees for publishing in the respective journals. Some promise a waiver or reduced fee if the work is submitted within a few days, others are straightforward with submission fees up to more than 1000 US dollars.

When I get those emails that are sometimes in abominable English I frequently wonder who submits his or her work to such journals. Some of them probably perish as quickly as they appear,

but the total number seems on the rise. Not all authors are making fun of predatory journals like John H. McCool who published a manuscript on an invented disease based entirely on an episode of a popular US television comedy [8]. The pressure to publish (or perish) seems to be immense and high rejection rates of established journals with rigorous peer review may shy off many potential authors. However, a peer review by true experts in the field is a privilege that ideally both the authors and the reviewer can benefit from, even if the manuscript is rejected. On the other hand, having an article published in a journal that is not listed in one of the major databases is merely a waste and may even become a disadvantage for the scientific career in the near future as predatory journals and publishers are listed in constantly updated databases [9] and these articles may not be of value when obtaining an academic title in many universities [4]. One should not be fooled by fake impact factors or false claims of being indexed in existing and non-existing libraries.

Despite warnings in many medical fields including orthopaedic surgery [3–6] the number of articles being published in predatory journals is constantly on the rise [7]. Besides potential personal disadvantages, this has a detrimental effect on the credibility of research and the medical science as a whole.

Therefore, to avoid disgrace to our specialty and ourselves, we as foot and ankle specialists who are interested in spreading the results of our work should carefully choose our target journals. They should be respected, read and discussed by your colleagues, listed in major official databases and provide peer review by experts in the field. The chance of a manuscript being rejected should be seen as a challenge and not as an obstacle. Amongst others, *Foot & Ankle Surgery* would be a good journal to start with.

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