





Irrational numbers of journal editors and of editorial positions: a threat to society

Olaf R. Van Loon¹  · A. J. (Tom) Van Loon² 

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Abstract

Journal editors are commonly considered as gate keepers who guarantee the quality of articles published in their journal. The numerous predatory, mostly medical, journals that have been initiated in the past two decades tend to have less interest in quality. As this threatens the trustworthiness of science, we investigated what developments take place regarding the most relevant editorial aspects of the numerous journals that approached us in the past twelve months with the request to submit or review a manuscript. These aspects include the presence of an Editor-in-Chief, the availability of the Editor-in-Chief for his editorial work, the size of the Editorial Board, and the country where the members of the Editorial Board live. The study shows that a large proportion of the journals are not led by an Editor-in-Chief. It also seems that the journals involved try to hide this by establishing editorial boards with irrational numbers (occasionally hundreds) of editors (invited by the journal without any check of their competence), who cannot be presumed to carry out any real editorial activities. A side effect of this development is that some scientists collect as many editorships as possible, resulting in an irrational number of editorial positions (several dozens, with additionally several positions as Editor-in-Chief), preventing proper editorial behavior. The tasks of such editors are commonly vague. It must be deduced that both irrationally large editorial boards and an irrationally large number of editorial positions are not only a threat to the scientific reliability of the pertinent editors and journals, but also a threat to healthcare. This implies that good scientists and practitioners, particularly in the medical sector, should refrain from becoming involved as an editor in such journals, and that submission of a manuscript to such journals should be discouraged.

Keywords Predatory journals · Medical journals · Editorial responsibility · Scientific-information transfer · Science ethics · Social threat · Healthcare

Extended author information available on the last page of the article

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Introduction

Times change, and so does the transfer of scientific information. While the ‘organized’ transfer of new scientific information occurred initially in the form of presentations during meetings of scientific societies, this became less effective when scientific research proliferated and the number of scientists increased. Scientific journals took over the role of communicator, initially publishing new data in (almost) all fields of science (Journal des Sçavans, 1665), later in the form of discipline-oriented journals. Ongoing specialization in the various scientific disciplines (which we consider here to include natural sciences, medical sciences and technology/engineering-related sciences), led unavoidably to ever more specialism-oriented journals.

The specialization of journals required editors who were experts in the discipline represented by a specific journal. This was not enough, however, when scientific research expanded further and new manuscripts on ever more specialist subjects were submitted for publication. The flow thus became too large—and the specialist material became too complex—for a single editor to handle. Consequently, fellow-scientists were attracted by the editor; jointly they formed the Editorial Board, with the original editor (from that moment on called ‘Editor-in-Chief’) as *primus inter pares*. The members of the Editorial Board reviewed manuscripts within their specific field of expertise and helped the Editor-in-Chief to find competent reviewers if the required expertise was not present within the Board. Later, the ever increasing flow of manuscript forced journals to look for reviewers outside the Editorial Board, but it remained a main task of the Board to find such reviewers. This procedure was, though not ideal, considered by the scientific community as sufficiently thorough. Editors (helped by the members of the Editorial Board and by reviewers) still were the gate keepers of scientific quality and reliability. This was reflected in the trust that scientists had in the quality of published research, enabling them to faithfully cite articles with earlier findings.

Two simultaneous new eras affecting society

Around the turning from the twentieth to the present century, two new eras (as far as science is considered) started. These developments had a strong influence on society because they changed the landscape of scientific communication fundamentally (Zoccali and Mallamaci 2023). One concerns the objective of science communication; the other one concerns the digitalization of our society.

The perish-or-publish culture

At the end of the twentieth century, society became confronted with organizations that changed their type of leadership: people who had made their career in a company to become eventually CEO in a business or professor at a university no longer were considered to be the most effective; they became replaced by managers, who also became decisive regarding the career prospects of employees. In universities (and comparable science-oriented organizations) this posed a serious problem: how could

managers decide which scientist did the best research? Instead of judging scientists on the basis of the *quality* of their publications, the *quantity* became the most important tool for such decisions. The earlier “small-is-beautiful” philosophy became thus replaced by the pressure to publish as many manuscripts as possible, irrespective of their relevance, quality and depth. This was the birth of the publish-or-perish culture (Andersen 2023), which is still the rule rather than the exception at most universities.

One of the consequences is that scientists can nowadays no longer by definition trust the quality of scientific publications, and citing articles published in so-called predatory journals (journals not interested in science but primarily—if not only—in collecting so-called ‘article processing charges’ from authors) is therefore now discouraged (e.g., Rathore and Farooq 2021). It remains difficult, however, to distinguish such predatory journals from recognized scholarly ones, as there is a vague ‘grey’ boundary between them (Shamseer et al. 2017); also bibliometric data leave questions (Kokol et al. 2018).

Due to the pressure to publish, the flow of submitted manuscripts changed into a tsunami, but the publishers of scientific journals had only limited space available. This led, following a basic economic rule (shortage triggers higher prices), to a revolution in science publishing: particularly commercial publishers saw an opportunity to increase their profit by asking article processing charges (APC) from authors. The publish-or-perish culture at universities made that researchers could only agree, and the APC became gradually a normal part of the research budget.

Digitalization and predatory journals

Shortly after the publish-or-perish culture had changed universities fundamentally, another revolution affected the entire society: the development of ever cheaper, faster and better computers led to digitalization of our society, obviously including the publishing of scientific information. The new technology offered several advantages, for the publishers (less postage cost, less printing cost, less time required for correspondence), for the reviewers (working in the digital manuscript), for the authors (faster handling, quicker publication, space for more articles in an issue), and for the readers (earlier receipt of an issue, possibility to search electronically).

Particularly the fact that printing was no longer essential, and that the commonly high postal costs could therefore also be avoided, made businessmen worldwide realize that the publishing of scientific journals might be a cheap and easy way to earn high profits. Attracting manuscripts was easy because of the publish-or-perish culture, and the manuscripts needed in principle only reformatting and storage on a website. Many of the other cost (e.g., for reviewing) could also be cut: the authors were supposed only to be glad that no critical questions would be asked. This presumption of the businessmen appeared correct, and both individuals and (commonly new) publishers started thousands of new journals, following the above ideas. The first one was probably the *Journal of Biological Sciences*, launched in 2001 by ANSINetwork, currently ANSInet. Nowadays, the medical sector is, unfortunately, by far the most represented among the thousands of predatory journals (Van Loon 2023).

Research gap

The workload of scientists, both in academia and commercial organizations, has increased significantly in the past decades. This leaves, as a rule, little time for ‘hobby activities’ such as reviewing manuscripts. Reviewers are rewarded for their commonly time-consuming work only rarely. It is therefore not surprising that journals have ever more problems finding appropriate reviewers. This raises several questions (see the “[Methodology](#)” section) that have never been answered satisfactorily. This implies that the entire review procedure is currently under debate, as low-quality (or even fraudulent) publications are a threat for science. Certainly as far as medical publications are concerned, insufficiently reviewed manuscripts pose also a direct threat to public health. The present contribution therefore focuses on the above problems in the medical sector.

Methodology

After the present authors had published (2022) their first joint paper in a medical journal, they became overflowed by requests from (mostly medical) journals to contribute a manuscript. The flow did not stop, and in June 2023 the corresponding author decided to monitor these requests. This resulted in only a year time in a list of 510 different journals, including 260 medical journals (more than 50%!). These medical journals were analyzed for their main editorial aspects: (1) do they have an Editor-in-Chief, (2) can de Editors-in-Chief—if present—do their editorial work properly, (3) how do they attract editors, (4) how large are their editorial boards, and (5) in how far can the members of the editorial board be actually involved in manuscript reviewing?

The answers to these questions can only occasionally be given on the basis of data provided by the journals involved: many of these journals seem reluctant to provide information about their way of functioning. Data about the editors therefore come partly from the journals’ websites, partly from searching on internet. Data about the editorial boards (commonly presented as a long list of editors) could, however, be taken directly from the journals’ websites; the country where they work could sometimes be found on the journals’ website, but had in other cases to be searched for on internet, for instance by checking articles that were co-authored by these editors. The data concerning the concentration of editorial functions among specific editors were obtained by painstaking search on internet for names, affiliations and resumes.

The data regarding the number of volumes and the number of published articles in specific years (required for the calculation of the workload of the editors involved in the journal) were obtained by counting all volumes, their issues and their articles in the relevant years.

The findings are presented in the following sections, and some examples are shown in the form of tables that clearly show that many of the medical journals potentially pose a threat to the quality of their manuscripts, and consequently indirectly also to public health.

The search for editors and editorial boards

Many of the new journals promise the scientists that they invite to contribute that their manuscripts will be handled within a short time (often less than a week); another common seductive offer is that the normal APC will be waived partially for authors in low-income countries. The common suggestion that submitted manuscripts will be reviewed by an editorial board/team/panel requires, in spite of the fact that this promise is commonly false, an editor and editorial board. For this reason, many of these journals approach scientists with the invitation to become an editor, suggesting that the ‘title’ of editor will increase their reputation (see also Byard 2022).

Excessive numbers of editors

It is remarkable how many scientists become seduced in this way (Rawas et al. 2020). This results in journals with very long lists of editors (not rarely hundreds); many of them seem to have hardly any experience in the discipline to which the journal is devoted. Particularly in the field of medicine it is easy to find publishers with journals that have so many ‘editors’ that one cannot imagine that they ever will have to show their editorial (or reviewer) expertise.

It is always tricky to pick out some example, but such examples offer the most convincing information. One such example is Spandidos Publications, a Greek Publisher with 12 medical journals in English (+1 in Chinese). The twelve English-language journals have jointly—in addition to 12 Editors-in-Chief and 65 Associate/Deputy Editors—not less than 3246 scientists presented as editors, Members of the Editorial Board or Members of what Spandidos mentions as the Editorial Academy. The in total 3323 ‘editors’ had jointly to handle 7804 articles for the past 5 volumes of each journal (the rejection rate is not known but probably almost 0), which implies some 2.3 articles per editor, during a period of commonly several years. Comparison of the number of ‘editors’ with the number of articles published in these journals (Table 1) shows no logical relationship.

It can be worse: as another example (of many more possible ones), the Baishideng Publishing Group, officially located in a suite in Pleasanton, California, USA (though probably effectively located in China, considering its Chinese daughter/sister company with the name F6 Publishing) publishes 47 medical journals (46 in English, 1 in Chinese). 45 of the 46 English-language journals provide data about the editors; one (*World Journal of Surgical Procedures*) does not (and did, when asked, only refer to the journal’s webpage that kept indicating the same error for the nine months that we checked it). The following numbers (see also Table 2) therefore are calculated on the basis of the available data from the other 45 journals. These (mostly fairly new) journals published since their establishment jointly 267 (yearly) volumes with 1546 articles, handled by 97 Editors-in-Chief, 100 Associate Editors and 2968 Members of an Editorial Board. Analysis of the first (alphabetically ordered) 7 journals in Table 2 indicates that they jointly published 50 volumes; the average per journal was 7 volumes with 221 articles, corresponding with 32 articles per volume. The 20 Editors-in-Chief, 16 Associate Editors and 680 Members of an Editorial Board (in total: 716) of these 7 journals had to handle 1546 articles, implying that each ‘editor’

Table 1 English-language journals and numbers of their various types of editors of Spandidos Publications (journals accessed September 11–12, 2023)

| Journal title | ISSN | E-i-C ^a | AE/ DE ^b | M EB ^c | Last 5 complete volumes (and number of issues) | Total number of articles in these volumes | Average number of articles/volume (articles/issue) |
|--|--------------------------------|--------------------|------------------------|-------------------|--|--|--|
| Biomedical Reports | (p) 2049-9434 (o) 2049-9442 | 1 | 3 | 175 | 14–18 (each 6 issues) | 55 + 52 + 54 + 45 + 42 = 248 | ~50 (~8) |
| Experimental and Therapeutic Medicine | (p) 1792–0981 (o) 1792–1015 | 1 | 3 | 618 | 21–25 (each 6 issues) | 662 + 824 + 436 + 227 + 305 = 2454 | ~491 (~16) |
| International Journal of Epigenetics | (p) 2752-5406 (o) 2752-5414 | 1 | 12 | 22 | 1–2 (each 4 issues) | 9 + 5 = 14 | 7 (~2) |
| International Journal of Func- tional Nutrition | (p) 2634-7989 (o) 2634-7237 | 1 | 19 | 81 | 1 (2), 2 (5), 3 (5) | 10 + 13 + 7 = 30 | 10 (~3) |
| International Journal of Molecular Medicine | (p) 1107-3756 (o) 1791-244X | 1 | 2 | 130 | 47–51 (each 6 issues) | 119 + 103 + 86 + 61 + 53 = 422 | ~84 (~14) |
| International Journal of Oncology | (p) 1019-6439 (o) 1791-2423 | 1 | 2 | 454 | 58–62 (each 6 issues) | 35 + 75 + 79 + 79 + 75 = 343 | ~69 (~11) |
| Medicine International | (p) 2754-3242 (o) 2754–1304 | 1 | 6 | 131 | 1 (5), 2 (6) | 25 + 35 = 60 | 30 (~5) |
| Molecular and Clinical Oncology | (p) 2049-9450 (o) 2049-9469 | 1 | 3 | 160 | 14–18 (each 6 issues) | 129 + 142 + 112 + 51 + 50 = 484 | ~97 (~16) |
| Molecular Medicine Reports | (p) 1791-2997 (o) 1791-3004 | 1 | 4 | 492 | 23–27 (each 6 issues) | 480 + 396 + 215 = 155 + 128 = 1374 | ~275 (~46) |
| Oncology Letters | (p) 1792–1074 (o) 1792–1082 | 1 | 4 | 603 | 21–25 (each 6 issues) | 494 + 363 + 199 + 267 + 274 = 1597 | ~319 (~53) |
| Oncology Reports | (p) 1021-335X (o) 1791-2431 | 1 | 2 | 234 | 45–49 (each 6 issues) | 119 + 141 + 118 + 104 + 130 = 612 | ~122 (~20) |
| World Academy of Sciences Journal | (p) 2632-2900 (o) 2632-2919 | 1 | 5 | 146 | 1–4 (each 6 issues) | 30 + 30 + 64 + 42 = 166 | ~42 (~7) |
| <i>Total number of journals: 12</i> | | <i>12</i> | <i>65</i> | <i>3246</i> | <i>51 (325)</i> | <i>7804</i> | <i>~153 (~24)</i> |

^aNumber of Editors-in-Chief

^bNumber of Associate Editors/Deputy Editors

^cNumber of Members of the Editorial Board

Table 2 Journals and numbers of their various types of editors of the Baishideng Publishing Group (journals accessed September 10, 2023)

| Journal title | ISSN | Number of Editors-in-Chief | Number of Associate Editors | Number of members of the Editorial Board | Volumes published | Total number of articles included | Average number of articles/volume |
|---|-----------|----------------------------|-----------------------------|--|--------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Artificial Intelligence in Cancer | 2644-3228 | 3 | 2 | 158 | 1 (2020)–3 (2022) | 23 | 8 |
| Artificial Intelligence in Gastroenterology | 2644-3236 | 2 | 3 | 190 | 1 (2020)–3 (2022) | 46 | 15 |
| Artificial Intelligence in Gastrointestinal Endoscopy | 2689-7164 | 3 | 3 | 116 | 1 (2020)–3 (2022) | 33 | 11 |
| Artificial Intelligence in Medical Imaging | 2644-3260 | 3 | 5 | 181 | 1 (2020)–3 (2022) | 37 | 12 |
| World Journal of Anesthesiology | 2218-6182 | 2 | 2 | 29 | 1 (2011)–11 (2022) | 43 | 4 |
| World Journal of Biological Chemistry | 1949-8454 | 3 | 0 | 101 | 1 (2010)–13 (2022) | 339 | 25 |
| World Journal of Cardiology | 1949-8462 | 4 | 1 | 63 | 1 (2009)–14 (2022) | 1025 | 73 |
| World Journal of Clinical Cases | 2307-8960 | 5 | 4 | 311 | 1 (2013)–10 (2022) | Not counted or calculated | |
| World Journal of Clinical Infectious Diseases | 2220-3176 | 4 | 0 | 8 | 1 (2011)–12 (2022) | | |
| World Journal of Clinical Oncology | 2216-4333 | 4 | 4 | 85 | 1 (2010)–13 (2022) | | |
| World Journal of Clinical Pediatrics | 2219-2808 | 4 | 0 | 88 | 1 (2012)–11 (2022) | | |
| World Journal of Clinical Urology | 2219-2816 | 2 | 0 | 6 | 1 (2011)–11 (2022) | | |
| World Journal of Critical Care Medicine | 2220-3141 | 1 | 0 | 30 | 1 (2012)–11 (2022) | | |
| World Journal of Dermatology | 2218-6190 | 1 | 1 | 8 | 1 (2012)–10 (2022) | | |
| World Journal of Diabetes | 1948-9358 | 3 | 17 | 75 | 1 (2010)–13 (2022) | | |
| World Journal of Experimental Medicine | 2220-315x | 2 | 3 | 23 | 1 (2011)–12 (2022) | | |
| World Journal of Gastroenterology | 1007-9327 | 1 | 12 | 414 | 1 (1995)–28 (2022) | | |
| World Journal of Gastrointestinal Endoscopy | 1948-5190 | 4 | 1 | 96 | 1 (2009)–14 (2022) | | |
| World Journal of Gastrointestinal Oncology | 1948-5204 | 2 | 2 | 64 | 1 (2009)–14 (2022) | | |

Table 2 (Continued)

| Journal title | ISSN | Number of Editors-in-Chief | Number of Associate Editors | Number of members of the Editorial Board | Volumes published | Total number of articles included | Average number of articles/volume |
|---|-----------|----------------------------|-----------------------------|--|----------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| World Journal of Gastrointestinal Pathophysiology | 2150-5330 | 3 | 1 | 48 | 1 (2010) – 13 (2022) | | |
| World Journal of Gastrointestinal Pharmacology and Therapeutics | 2150-5349 | 1 | 0 | 22 | 1 (2010) – 13 (2022) | | |
| World Journal of Gastrointestinal Surgery | 1948-9366 | 1 | 4 | 100 | 1 (2009) – 14 (2022) | | |
| World Journal of Hematology | 2218-6204 | 1 | 0 | 11 | 1 (2012) – 9 (2022) | | |
| World Journal of Hepatology | 1948-5182 | 3 | 4 | 196 | 1 (2009) – 14 (2022) | | |
| World Journal of Hypertension | 2220-3168 | 2 | 1 | 19 | 1 (2011) – 12 (2022) | | |
| World Journal of Immunology | 2219-2824 | 2 | 3 | 15 | 1 (2011) – 12 (2022) | | |
| World Journal of Medical Genetics | 2220-3184 | 1 | 0 | 8 | 1 (2011) – 10 (2022) | | |
| World Journal of Meta-Analysis | 2308-3840 | 2 | 0 | 43 | 1 (2013) – 10 (2022) | | |
| World Journal of Methodology | 2222-0682 | 1 | 3 | 22 | 1 (2011) – 12 (2022) | | |
| World Journal of Nephrology | 2220-6124 | 2 | 0 | 26 | 1 (2012) – 11 (2022) | | |
| World Journal of Neurology | 2218-6212 | 1 | 0 | 8 | 1 (2011) – 8 (2022) | | |
| World Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology | 2218-6220 | 1 | 1 | 12 | 1 (2012) – 11 (2022) | | |
| World Journal of Ophthalmology | 2218-6239 | 1 | 0 | 4 | 1 (2011) – 13 (2022) | | |
| World Journal of Orthopedics | 2218-5836 | 2 | 1 | 58 | 1 (2010) – 13 (2022) | | |
| World Journal of Otorhinolaryngology | 2218-6247 | 1 | 1 | 12 | 1 (2011) – 9 (2022) | | |
| World Journal of Pharmacology | 2220-3192 | 3 | 1 | 31 | 1 (2012) – 11 (2022) | | |
| World Journal of Psychiatry | 2220-3206 | 3 | 5 | 67 | 1 (2011) – 12 (2022) | | |
| World Journal of Radiology | 1949-8470 | 1 | 3 | 45 | 1 (2009) – 14 (2022) | | |
| World Journal of Respirology | 2218-6255 | 1 | 0 | 2 | 1 (2011) – 11 (2022) | | |
| World Journal of Rheumatology | 2220-3214 | 1 | 0 | 11 | 1 (2011) – 10 (2022) | | |

Table 2 (Continued)

| Journal title | ISSN | Number of Editors-in-Chief | Number of Associate Editors | Number of members of the Editorial Board | Volumes published | Total number of articles included | Average number of articles/volume |
|---|-----------|----------------------------|-----------------------------|--|-----------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| World Journal of Stem Cells | 1948-0210 | 2 | 3 | 76 | 1 (2009) – 14 (2022) | | |
| World Journal of Stomatology | 2218-6263 | 1 | 0 | 11 | 1 (2011) – 7 (2019) | | |
| World Journal of Surgical Procedures ^a | 2219-2832 | 2 | ??? | ??? | 1 (2011) – 12 (2022) | | |
| World Journal of Translational Medicine | 2220-6132 | 2 | 0 | 16 | 1 (2012) – 11 (2022) | | |
| World Journal of Transplantation | 2220-3230 | 4 | 6 | 39 | 1 (2011) – 12 (2022) | | |
| World Journal of Virology | 2220-3249 | 3 | 3 | 20 | 1 (2012) – 11 (2022) | | |
| Total: 46 journal titles | | 97+2 | 100+?? | 2968+?? | 267+12 volumes | | |

^aThe website of the World Journal of Surgical Procedures showed only "Sorry, an error was encountered on this page. Please try again later" from September 10, 2023, to January 23, 2024

had on average to handle 1546: 716=2.2 articles, spread over a period of, on average, 7 years, implying 0.3 articles per editor per year. One might question whether such duties require so many editors, apart from the question of these editors were, indeed, really involved, for instance as reviewers. The number of the Members of the Editorial Boards of the Baidisheng journals (and those of many other predatory publishers) must be considered outrageous, particularly considering that “the modal journal has 11 editorial board members” (Nishikawa-Pacher et al. 2023).

The large number of editors of such journals are most likely due to the requests that many of the new journals send to scientists to join the journal as an editor, even if the invited scientist has not any experience in the subject covered by the journal (the second author, not a medical professional, received several such requests from medical journals, including a request to become Editor-in-Chief).

Changing attitudes of editors

Being reviewer, member of an editorial board or editor is a time-consuming activity. Being Editor-in-Chief is even much more time-consuming. Numerous scientists therefore refrain from such activities. Other scientists, however, seem to collect as many editorial positions as possible. This may be understandable as far as it concerns acting as a reviewer (this activity can be scientifically very rewarding), but, if so, the invitation should mention that it concerns being part of a reviewers pool or—at most—a member of an Editorial Board. Both aspects are dealt with in the below sections.

Excessive functions held by experienced scientists

However difficult it may be to find a capable Editor-in-Chief, and however overloaded experienced researchers and editors tend to be, it appears that some of them seem to consider themselves as some kind of Superman. Once again: it is tricky to provide some examples, but they are enlightening. The first example concerns a Professor of Internal Medicine. When checked on internet (August 2023–June 2024), he was found to hold 13 positions as Editor-in-Chief, 1 position as Associate Editor, and 48 positions as Member of an Editorial Board (in total 62 positions). It seems physically impossible that he holds all these positions (Table 3) doing the work properly that may be expected by 62 science-devoted journals.

A second example concerns a retired cardiovascular surgeon. He holds (following internet; checked August 2023–June 2024) 6 positions as Editor-in-Chief, 1 position as Associate Editor, and 57 positions as Member of an Editorial Board (in total 64 positions: Table 4). Although retired, these positions would jointly require much more time than even a retired professor can have.

Many more examples can be found by checking internet. We checked the 510 journals that approached us during a year (July 2023–June 2024), and we found that concentrations of editorial functions are not a rare phenomenon. A highly alarming aspect is that such a concentration of editorial functions appears restricted to the medical sector: it was not found in any of the 250 journals devoted to other disciplines.

Table 3 Combined editorial functions of a professor of Internal Medicine (according to the respective journal websites, August 2023–June 2024)

| Function number | Journal title | ISSN | Publisher | Publisher's address | APC |
|---|--|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------------|---------------|
| Editor-in-Chief | | | | | |
| 1 | Salient Journal of Cardiology | 2994-774X | Salient Visionary Publications | Casper, WY 82,609 USA | 1800-3600 |
| 2 | Annals of Clinical Medicine and Medical Research (<i>jointly with the Editor of Table 4</i>) | 2994-7464 | Salient Visionary Publications | Casper, WY 82,609 USA | 1800-3600 |
| 3 | Archives of Life Science and Nutritional Research | 2765-8368 | Gudapuris | Morgan Hill, CA 95,037 USA | 500 |
| 4 | Cahiers Santé - Médecine Thérapeutique | (p) 2780-8858 (o) 2780-8866 | John Libbey Eurotext | Nantes France | Not indicated |
| 5 | Clinics in Medicine and Medical Research | None (2023-08-19) | Salient Visionary Publications | Casper, WY 82,609 USA | 1800-3600 |
| 6 | International Journal of Hematology and Blood Disorders | 2639-7986 | Symbiosis Online Publishers | Normal, IL 61,761 USA | 699 |
| 7 | International Journal of Clinical Studies & Medical Case Reports | 2692-5877 | stand-alone journal | Beverly Hills, CA 90,212 USA | Not indicated |
| 8 | International Journal of Hematology and Blood Disorders | 2639-7986 | Symbiosis | Normal, IL 61,761 USA | 699 |
| 9 | Journal of Biomedical and Pharmaceutical Sciences | 2952-8100 | Hilaris Publishing SRL | 1170 Brussels Belgium | 1400 |
| 10 | Journal of Blood Disorders & Transfusion | 2155-9804 | Walsh Medical Media | London UB8 1QG UK | 919-2500 |
| 11 | Journal of Clinical Medicine | 2077–0383 | MDPI | Basel Switzerland | 2000 |
| 12 | Journal of Internal Medicine and Geriatrics | 2689-7687 | SciTech Central | Covina, CA 91,723 USA | 1825 |
| 13 | Journal of Oncology Case Reports Online | None (2024-06-20) | Salient Visionary Publications | Casper, WY 82,609 USA | 1800-3600 |
| Associate Editor | | | | | |
| 14 | Frontiers in Immunology | 1664-3224 | Frontiers Media SA | Lausanne Switzerland | 490-3205 |
| Member of the Editorial Board/Team/Panel | | | | | |
| 15 | ARC Journal of Immunology and Vaccins | None (2023-08-19) | ARC Publications, | Ongole Andhira Pradesh 523,001 India | 75-450 |
| 16 | Advances in Bioengineering and Biomedical Science Research | 2640-4133 | Opast Publishers | Overland Park, KS 66,221 USA | 2585 |

Table 3 (continued)

| Function number | Journal title | ISSN | Publisher | Publisher's address | APC |
|-----------------|---|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|---------------|
| 17 | Advances in Hematology and Oncology Research | 2692-5516 | Opast Publishers | Overland Park, KS 66,221 USA | 2099 |
| 18 | AIMS Allergy and Immunology | 2575-615X | AIMS Press | Springfield MO 65,801–2604 USA | Not indicated |
| 19 | Annals of Community Medicine & Public Health | None (2023-08-19) | Remedy Publications | Hyderabad 500,081 India | 1800-3600 |
| 20 | Annals of Medicine Research and Public Health | 2995-5955 | Salient Visionary Publications | Casper, WY 82,609 USA | 1800-3600 |
| 21 | Associative Journal of Health Sciences | 2690-9707 | Crimson Publishers | New York, NY 10,022 USA | 633-1999 |
| 22 | Clinical Infecteous Diseases | 2684-4559 | Hilaris Publishing SRL | 1170 Brussels Belgium | Not indicated |
| 23 | Clinical Research | 2837-9152 | Magnus Med Club | Westerville, OH 43,081 USA | 520 |
| 24 | Clinical Research: Open Access | 2469-6714 | Sci Forschen Inc. | Milpitas, CA 95,035 USA | Not indicated |
| 25 | ES Journal of Cardiology | 2768–0533 | eScientific Library | Dover, DE 19,901 USA | 1620 |
| 26 | Examines in Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation | 2637-7934 | Crimson Publishers | New York, NY 10,022 USA | 633-1999 |
| 27 | Experimental and Therapeutic Medicine | (p) 1792–0981 (o) 1792–1015 | Spandidos Publishers | Athens 11,634 Greece | 1450 |
| 28 | Exploratory Research and Hypothesis in Medicine | (p) 2993-5113 (e) 2472–0712 | Xie & He Publishing | Wuhan (China) | 1000 |
| 29 | Fortune Journal of Rheumatology | 2688-6766 | Fortune Journals | Houston, TX 77,082 USA | 200-1500 |
| 30 | Gerontology & Geriatric Research | 2167-7182 | Walsh Medical Media | London UB8 1QG UK | 1019 |
| 31 | Hematology International Journal | 2578-501X | Medwin Publishers | Novi, MI 48,377 USA | 449-2549 |
| 32 | Internal Medicine and Medical Investigation Journal | 2474-7750 | Mehrabani Publishing | Iran? | 40–70 |
| 33 | International Journal of Contemporary Research and Review | 0976-4852 | Stand-alone | New Delhi India | not indicated |
| 34 | International Journal of e-Healthcare Information Systems | 2046-3332 | Infonomics Society | London E14 5AA UK | 500 |

Table 3 (continued)

| Function number | Journal title | ISSN | Publisher | Publisher's address | APC |
|-----------------|---|-------------------|--|-----------------------------------|---------------|
| 35 | International Journal of Geriatrics and Gerontology | 2577–0748 | Gavin Publishers | Keillor Downs, VIC 3038 Australia | 560-4060 |
| 36 | Journal of Aging and Geriatric Medicine | 2576-3946 | SciTechnol | London WC1A 2SE UK | 950 |
| 37 | Journal of Bioengineering & Biomedical Science | 2155-9538 | Hilaris Publishing SRL | 1170 Brussels Belgium | Not indicated |
| 38 | Journal of Blood Pressure and Hypertension | None (2023-08-19) | Scholarena | Warrensburg, MO 64,093 USA | 2280 |
| 39 | Journal of Cardiac Disorders and Therapy | 2637-465X | Scholarena | Warrensburg, MO 64,093 USA | 2280 |
| 40 | Journal of Chronic Diseases and Management | 2573–1300 | JSciMed Central | Hyderabad India | Not indicated |
| 41 | Journal of Clinical Infectious Diseases & Practice | 2476-213X | OMICS International | Visakhapatnam 530,016 India | 2055 |
| 42 | Journal of Clinical and Laboratory Research | 2768–0487 | Auctores | Lewes, DE 19,958 USA | 399-1999 |
| 43 | Journal of Clinical Medicine and Therapeutics | None (2023-08-19) | Insight Medical Publishing (iMedPub) | London N13 4BS UK | Not indicated |
| 44 | Journal of Community Medicine And Public Health Reports | 2692-9899 | Aquaint Publications | Lewes, DE 19,958 USA | 149-949 |
| 45 | Journal of Dental Research and Reports | 2693-9266 | Medical Editor and Educational Research Publishers | Uxbridge UB8 1EX UK | 180 |
| 46 | Journal of Emergency Medicine Forecast | 2643-7856 | Science Forecast Publications | Centreville, VA 20,121 USA | Not indicated |
| 47 | Journal of Hematology and Blood Disorders | 2455-7641 | Annex Publishers | Manassas, VA 20,110 USA | Not indicated |
| 48 | Journal of Hematology and Clinical Research | 2640-2823 | Heighten Science Publications | East Windsor CT 06088-9767, USA | 1849 |
| 49 | Journal of Hematology and Oncology Reswarch | 2372-6601 | Open Access Pub | Valley Cottage, NY 10,989 USA | 1800 |
| 50 | Journal of Medical Case Reports And Case Series | 2692-8980 | Aquaint Publications | Lewes, DE 19,958 USA | Not indicated |

Table 3 (continued)

| Function number | Journal title | ISSN | Publisher | Publisher's address | APC |
|-----------------|---|-------------------|--|------------------------------|---------------|
| 51 | Journal of Rheumatology and Arthritis Research | None | Scholarena | Warrensburg, MO 64,093 USA | 2289 |
| 52 | Journal of Rheumatology and Connective Tissue Diseases | None (2024-06-20) | Boffin Access | Londom EC1V 2NX UK | Not indicated |
| 53 | Madridge Journal of Oncogenesis | 2641-5267 | Madridge Publishers | Pleasanton, CA 94,588 USA | 369-899 |
| 54 | Mathews Journal of Immunology & Allergy | 2575-9523 | Mathews Open Access Journals | Pleasanton, CA 94,588 USA | 839 |
| 55 | Oncogen | 2641-9475 | Magnus Med Club | Westerville, OH 43,081 USA | 1099 |
| 56 | Online journal of Cardiology Research and Reports | 2693-4965 | Iris Publishers | San Francisco, CA 84,104 USA | 649-1780 |
| 57 | Open Access Journal of Oncology | 2689-6168 | Academic Strive | Hyderabad 50,076 India | 699-1949 |
| 58 | ProClinS Cardiology | None (2023-08-19) | ProClinS | Hyderabad India | 999 |
| 59 | Research & Reviews: Journal of Hospital and Clinical Pharmacy | None (2023-08-19) | RROIJ-Open Access Journals FZE | Dubai UAE | 1250 |
| 60 | Salient Journal of Cardiology | 2994-774X | Salient Visionary Publications | Casper, WY 82,609 USA | 1800-3600 |
| 61 | SF Journal of Emergency Medicine | 2643-7856 | Science Forecast Digital Science Library | Centreville, VA 20,121 USA | Not indicated |
| 62 | SM Journal of Hematology & Oncology | None (2023-08-19) | JSciMed Central | Hyderabad India | Not indicated |

Even more alarming is that the two editors of whom the functions are indicated in Tables 3 and 4 appear to continue collecting editorial positions, even though it is obvious that they could not even fulfill all their duties appropriately in August 2023 when they held 'only' 46 and 43 positions, respectively. The concentration of editorial positions among a small group of established medical researchers is possibly due to the common contacts between established scientists in medicine during conferences, etc. Such common contacts may result easily in some kind of co-optation regarding editorial positions. It is noteworthy in this context that the scientists mentioned in Tables 3 and 4 share a position of Editor-in-Chief of the same journal. Moreover, they have several publishers in common regarding journals in which they hold editorial positions. This suggests that some form of co-optation, or at least recommendation, exists as far as editorial positions are concerned.

Table 4 Editorial functions of a retired cardiovascular surgeon (according to journal websites, August 2023–June 2024)

| Function number | Journal title | ISSN | Publisher | Publisher's address | APC (US\$) |
|---|---|-------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------|
| Editor-in-Chief | | | | | |
| 1 | Annals of Clinical Medicine and Medical Research (jointly with the Editor of Table 3) | None (2023-08-27) | Salient Visionary Publications | Casper, WY 82,609 USA | 1800-3600 |
| 2 | Annals of Surgery and Research | None (2023-08-27) | Salient Visionary Publications | Casper, WY 82,609 USA | 1800-3600 |
| 3 | Clinics in Medicine and Medical Research (with Andres) | None (2023-08-27) | Salient Visionary Publications | Casper, WY 82,609 USA | 1800-3600 |
| 4 | International Journal of Nephrology and Kidney Failure | 2380-5498 | Sci forschen | Milpitas, Ca 95,035 USA | 950-2250 |
| 5 | Salient Journal of Urology | None (2023-08-27) | Salient Visionary Publications | Casper, WY 82,609 USA | 1800-3600 |
| 6 | Series of Cardiology Research | 2768-5985 | SeriesScience International | Minneapolis, MN 55,402, USA | 1530 |
| Associate Editor | | | | | |
| 7 | Cureus | 2168-8184 | Springer Nature | London / Berlin / San Francisco | 0 |
| Member of the Editorial Board/Team/Panel | | | | | |
| 8 | Academia Medicine | 2994-435X | Academia.edu Publishing | San Francisco, CA 94,104 USA | 2000 |
| 9 | Acta Scientific Cardiovascular System | None (2023-08-27) | Acta Scientific Publications | Hyderabad 500,085 India | 499 |
| 10 | Advancements in Journal of Urology and Nephrology | 2689-8616 | OPast Publishers | Overland Park, KS 66,221 USA | 1999 |
| 11 | American Journal of Biomedical Science and Research | 2642–1747 | BiomedGrid LLC | Orange, CA 92,868 USA | 1879-2579 |
| 12 | American Journal of Epidemiology & Public Health | 2644-0032 | SciRes Literature | Middletown, DE 19,709 USA | Not indicated |
| 13 | Americsn Journal of Surgery and Surgical Research | None (2024-06-20) | Salient Visionary Publications | Casper, WY 82,609 USA | 1800-3600 |
| 14 | American Journal of Surgical Techniques and Case Reports | 2694-4901 | MedText Publications | Chicago IL 60,659 USA | 1945-3600 |

Table 4 (continued)

| Function number | Journal title | ISSN | Publisher | Publisher's address | APC (US\$) |
|-----------------|--|-------------------|---|-------------------------------|---------------|
| 15 | Annals of Clinical Medicine and Medical Research | None (2023-08-27) | Salient Visionary Publications | Casper, WY 82,609 USA | 1800-3600 |
| 16 | Annals of Current Gastroenterology Research | None (2024-06-20) | Remedy Publications | Hyderabad 500,081 India | 1800-3600 |
| 17 | Annals of Medical and Surgical Case Reports | 2652-9386 | Global Research Federation = GRF Publishers | Melbourne, VIC 3000 Australia | 480-1360 |
| 18 | Annals of Medicinal Chemistry | None (2024-06-20) | Remedy Publications | Hyderabad 5,000,081 India | 1800-3600 |
| 19 | Annals of Medicine Research and Public Health | 2995-5955 | Salient Visionary Publications | Casper, WY 82,609 USA | 1800-3600 |
| 20 | Annals of Oncology and Cancer Research | None (2024-06-20) | Salient Visionary Publications | Casper, WY 82,609 USA | 1800-3600 |
| 21 | Annals of Research and Reviews | 2641-8320 | Remedy Publications | Hyderabad 500,081 India | 1800-3600 |
| 22 | Annals of Robotic Surgery | None (2024-06-20) | Remedy Publications | Hyderabad 500,081 India | 1800-3600 |
| 23 | Annals of Surgery and Research | None (2023-08-27) | Salient Visionary Publications | Casper, WY 82,609 USA | 1800-3600 |
| 24 | Archives of Case Reports | 2637-3793 | Heighten Science Publications | Windsor, CT 06088-9767 USA | 2593 |
| 25 | Archives of Clinical Nephrology | 2581-3870 | Peertechn Publications | Los Angeles, CA 90,024 USA | 1049-1549 |
| 26 | Archives of Nephrology | 2639-3573 | Sryahwa Publications | Lewes, DE 19,958 USA | Not indicated |
| 27 | Archives of Nephrology and Renal Studies | None (2023-08-27) | Scientific Archives | Wilmington, DE 19,804 USA | 255-750 |
| 28 | Biomedical Research and Clinical Reviews | None (2024-06-20) | Auctores Publishing | Lewes, DE 19,958 USA | Not indicated |
| 29 | Cardiology Cases and Systematic Reviews | None (2024-06-20) | Wright Academia | Loxahatchee, FL 17,888 USA | Not indicated |
| 30 | Cardiovascular Disease and Medicine | 2771-1889 | Spring Library | Dover, DE 19,901 USA | GBP 999 |
| 31 | Cases | 2836-1555 | Magnus Med Club (MMC) | Westerville, OH 43,081 USA | 520 |

Table 4 (continued)

| Function number | Journal title | ISSN | Publisher | Publisher's address | APC (US\$) |
|-----------------|---|-------------------------------|--|---|---------------|
| 32 | Clarimen Journal of Cardiology | None (2023-08-27) | Clarimen Research | Haryana 122,002 India | 119 |
| 33 | Clinics in Surgery | 2474–1647 | Remedy Publications | Hyderabad 500,081 India | 1985-3600 |
| 34 | CPQ Cardiology | None (2023-08-27) | Cient Periodique | no city or country indicated on the website | 299-399 |
| 35 | ES Journal of Cardiology | 2768–0533 | eScientific Open International Library | Dover, DE 19,901 USA | 1620 |
| 36 | General Surgery and Clinical Medicine | 2836-4961 | OPast Publishers | Overland Park, KS 66,221 USA | 2519 |
| 37 | Global Journal of Nutrition & Food Science | 2644-2981 | Iris Publishers | San Francisco, CA 94,104 USA | 649-1780 |
| 38 | Global Urology and Nephrology | “yet to receive” (2023-08-27) | Scient Open Access | Las Vegas, NV 89,107 | 999 |
| 39 | International Journal of Cardiovascular Research and Innovation | None (2023-08-27) | Reseapro Journals | Bhubaneswar 751,013 India | 1000 |
| 40 | International Journal of Genome Research | None (2024-06-20) | Salient Visionary Publications | Casper, WY 82,609 USA | 1800-3600 |
| 41 | International Journal of Internal and Emergency Medicine | 2640-656X | Remedy Publications | Hyderabad 500,081 India | 1800-3600 |
| 42 | International Journal of Nephrology and Kidney Failure | 2380-5498 | Sci Forschen | Milpitas, Ca 95,035 USA | Not indicated |
| 43 | International Journal of Nursing & Care | 2573-8879 | CME Live | New Orleans, LA 70,130 USA | 399-999 |
| 44 | Journal of Cardiology and Cardiovascular Sciences | 2578-3025 | Stand-alone | Grand Rapids, MI 49,525 USA | 950 |
| 45 | Journal of Cardiology and Cardiovascular Therapy | 2474-7580 | Juniper Publishers | Irvine, CA 92,612 USA | 1080-2480 |
| 46 | Journal of Cardiology and Therapy | 2312-122X | ACT PublishingGroup | Wanchai, Hong Kong | 360 |
| 47 | Journal of Cardiothoracic Surgery and Therapeutics | 2643-5780 | Scholars Direct | Oakland, CA 94,612 USA | 1300 |
| 48 | Journal of Cardiovascular Diseases | 2831-3437 | Directive Publications | Chesterton, IN 46,304 USA | Not indicated |

Table 4 (continued)

| Function number | Journal title | ISSN | Publisher | Publisher's address | APC (US\$) |
|-----------------|---|-------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------------|---------------|
| 49 | Journal of Clinical and Medical Surgery | 2833-5465 | Open Source Publications | Las Vegas, NV 89,107 USA | Not indicated |
| 50 | Journal of Heart and Cardiovascular Medicine | None (2023-08-27) | Somato Publications (SP) | Middle town, DE 19,709 USA | 1500 |
| 51 | Journal of Nephrology and Dialysis Medicine | 2767-5149 | Sciaccess Publishers LLC | Grand Rapids, MI 49,525 USA | 750 |
| 52 | Journal of Nephrology and Renal Disorders | None (2027-08-27) | Scholarena | Warrensburg, MO 64,093 USA | 2280 |
| 53 | Journal of Oncology Case Reports Online | None (2024-06-20) | Salient Visionary Publications | Casper, WY 82,609 USA | 1800-3600 |
| 54 | Journal of Regenerative Medicine & Biology Research | None (2024-06-20) | Atheneum Scientific Publidhers | Mohali 140,603 India | 159-198 |
| 55 | Journal of Renal Surgery | None (2023-08-27) | Scholars Direct | Oakland, CA 94,612 USA | 1300 |
| 56 | Journal of Plant Sciences and Crop Protection | 2639-3336 | Annex Publishers | Manassas, VA 20,110 USA | 2280 |
| 57 | Madridge Journal of Case Reports and Studies | 2639-4553 | Madridge Publishers | Pleasanton, CA 94,588 USA | 499-1299 |
| 58 | Medical Research | 2689-8365 | Magnus Med Club | Westerville, OH 43,081 USA | 1099 |
| 59 | Medicine & Pharmacology | 2996–2625 | OPast publishers | Overland Park, KS 66,221 USA | Not indicated |
| 60 | Novel Techniques in Nutrition and Food Science | 2640-9208 | Crimson Publishers | New York, NY 10,022 USA | 633-1999 |
| 61 | Open Journal of Pathology and Toxicology Research | 2836-3752 | Iris Publishers | San Francisco, CA 94,104 USA | 649-1780 |
| 62 | Salient Journal of Cardiology | 2994-774X | Salient Visionary Publications | Casper, WY 82,609 USA | 1800-3600 |
| 63 | Salient Journal of Urology | None (2023-08-27) | Salient Visionary Publications | Casper, WY 82,609 USA | 1800-3600 |
| 64 | Urology—Open Access Open journal | 2771–0610 | SOAOJ Publishing | Hyderabad 500,081 India | 239-1139 |

Such an ‘editorial incrowd’ seems undesirable for objective judgments about the acceptability of submitted manuscripts. But the concentration of so many editorial functions within one person is even more undesirable for another reason: it is impossible to imagine that a single person can do all required editorial activities appropriately, as all these functions (and particular the function of Editor-in-Chief) require much time.

Excessive functions collected by young scientists

In contrast to the above-mentioned ‘incrowd editors’, some—commonly relatively young—scientists seem to apply for editorships in numerous new medical journals. This is made easy because many journals send requests to join their editorial board. This leads commonly to unjustifiable large editorial boards. An example is the *Medical Journal of Clinical Trials & Case Studies* (initiated in 2017 by Medwin Publishers) with 1 Editor-in-Chief, 28 editors, and 267 Associate editors (journal’s website accessed December 18, 2023). Volume 7 (2023) had 4 issues with, respectively, 3, 7, 10 and 11 contributions. It is obvious that the editorial handling of only 31 contributions in a year does not need almost 300 editors. The above figures suggest (and this is found correct by checking medical journals on internet) that the large majority of particularly the Members of the Editorial Boards are scientists from universities in countries with little international recognition (Table 5). This seems to imply that these scientists hope to find recognition on the basis of their editorship, following the standard of most universities (Byard 2022). This is the more likely since several names of these Editors can be found on editorial lists of other new medical journals. It is also interesting in this context that not only some scientists are collecting as many editorships as possible, but that the just-mentioned journal (like many others) seems to have a similar interest: collecting editors from as many countries as possible (Table 5).

It can thus be deduced that the new medical journals recruit two types of editors: those who form an “old boys’ network” and those who are looking for recognition on the basis of a title, rather than on the basis of accrued expertise. Neither seems to be beneficial for the journals involved, as it is still widely agreed upon in the scientific community that high-quality reviewing is a *conditio sine qua non* for trustworthy science (Mavrogenis and Scarlat 2023).

Discussion

The editorial philosophy of most new medical journals seems fundamentally different from that of the ‘old’ scholarly medical journals. Obviously, the experience-based data presented here are no proof, but they form a sound basis for convincing interpretation. It should be realized in this context that new journals are launched every day, so that it is—apart from the impossibility to check the giant number of journals—not feasible to present an up-to-date overview with all relevant data.

It is nevertheless clear that the majority of new medical journals want to establish large editorial boards and that a significant number of medical researchers and prac-

Table 5 Countries of the various types of editors involved in the *Medical Journal of Clinical Trials & Case studies* (accessed December 18, 2023)

| Editor-in-Chief | | | | | |
|---|----------|------------------|----------|------------------|----------|
| Country | <i>n</i> | | | | |
| Japan | 1 | | | | |
| Editors (=members of the Editorial Board) | | | | | |
| Editors' country | <i>n</i> | Editors' country | <i>n</i> | Editors' country | <i>n</i> |
| | | | | Chile | 1 |
| India | 61 | Taiwan | 3 | Cuba | 1 |
| USA | 42 | Thailand | 3 | Finland | 1 |
| Egypt | 19 | Bulgaria | 2 | Hungary | 1 |
| Turkye | 17 | Cameroon | 2 | Indonesia | 1 |
| Saudi Arabia | 13 | China | 2 | Israel | 1 |
| Tunesia | 8 | Colombia | 2 | Japan | 1 |
| Spain | 7 | Ethiopia | 2 | Macedonia | 1 |
| Brazil | 6 | France | 2 | Malta | 1 |
| Italy | 6 | Iran | 2 | Mexico | 1 |
| Iraq | 5 | Mongolia | 2 | Moldova | 1 |
| Bangladesh | 4 | Nepal | 2 | Morocco | 1 |
| Greece | 4 | Serbia | 2 | Myanmar | 1 |
| Iran | 3 | Singapore | 2 | Netherlands | 1 |
| Italy | 3 | UAE | 2 | Palestine | 1 |
| Jordan | 3 | Uganda | 2 | Poland | 1 |
| Nigeria | 3 | Ukraine | 2 | Qatar | 1 |
| Oman | 3 | Belarus | 1 | South Korea | 1 |
| Pakistan | 3 | Belgium | 1 | Sri Lanka | 1 |
| Russia | 3 | Bosnia Herz. | 1 | UK | 1 |
| Sudan | 3 | Canada | 1 | Vietnam | 1 |

n number of editors

tioners are willing to join these boards (see Tables 3 and 4 as examples), possibly because they are commonly presented by the journals with the 'title' of Editor. It can be calculated that this leads to a situation where these 'editors' (who are most likely not supposed to carry out any real editorial work, but rather form some kind of pool of potential reviewers) are not really functioning.

This raises the questions of (1) why journals want to incorporate so many scientists, and (2) why so many scientists want to lend their names to often dubious journals.

The underlying wish of the new journals to make a reliable impression

The first question must have a financial answer, as the only objective of predatory journals is to optimize their profits. It might well be that the journals hope (if not expect) that the 'editors' feel morally obliged to submit manuscripts to their 'own' journals; this cannot be effective, however, if the scientists who become seduced to accept editorial functions take so many of these functions that they never will be able to submit, within a foreseeable time, a manuscript to each of these journals (unless the journals urge to submit material, however low the quality may be).

This would be consistent with both the ‘only for profit’ philosophy of predatory journals, and their ‘we don’t care about quality, because the articles are not supposed to be read’ philosophy. This is widely recognized nowadays as a threat to science (e.g., Bhattacharya 2022; Rupp et al. 2019), but it is still insufficiently recognized as a threat to the medical trustworthiness and, consequently, to public health.

The search by young scientists for recognition

The answer to the second question must be that collecting editorships can be attractive for scientists who have no or little recognition yet, either because their research is of low quality, or because they are employed by universities or other organizations that are not interested in—or have insufficient financial possibilities for—high-quality research and publishing. This is well expressed if the editorial boards are analyzed for the countries where the editors (also indicated as members of the Editorial Board) are employed. An example is shown in Table 5, which indicates that the pertinent journal distinctly must have selected the editors from as many countries as possible (61!). The countries from which most editors come are certainly not the countries with the highest scientific output, and the countries with a high scientific output are mostly badly represented in the list of editors. Analysis of the expertise of the editors indicates that few are recognized experts in their fields; this can, understandably, not be further detailed here because these data are privacy-sensitive. It can nevertheless be deduced that the unreasonably large editorial boards as exemplified in Table 5 consist mainly of young scientists who do not have the quality or possibility to carry out high-quality research and to publish these results.

The high article processing charges (APC) that many journals ask may also well play a role in this context, but this cannot explain everything because established scholarly journals may waive the APC, whereas this seems to be done by predatory journals only in the case of an emergency (the fairly common situation of a complete lack of manuscripts that may lead to years of interruption in the publishing scheme and occasionally to termination of the journal).

Conclusions

From the beginning of science publishing, editors have taken the role of gate keepers of quality. This has come to an end when, triggered by the publish-or-perish philosophy at universities, predatory journals were launched in ever larger numbers, particularly in the medical sector. It has been recognized that they do, as a rule, not or hardly review submitted manuscripts, but they try to hide this by presenting—commonly continuously growing—editorial boards. They do so by inviting scientists (often in combination with a request to submit a manuscript). It appears that two groups of scientists are inclined to accept such an invitation: (1) established scientists who form “old boys’ networks” that expand by some type of co-optation, and (2) particularly young scientists seeking for some recognition. This has two unwanted consequences: (1) journals with such large editorial boards that potential authors cannot judge the

quality of the scientists that may become involved in the review of their manuscript, and (2) scientists may ‘collect’ dozens of editorial positions.

Both situations imply that the quality of the journal and the published articles cannot be guaranteed. It should be noticed in this context that such a guarantee did not exist in the ‘pre-predatory’ age either (as shown by the forced retraction of articles and the notice about fraudulent publications), but such problems were exceptionally rare, due to the commonly critical reviewing of manuscripts by experts in the pertinent discipline. The fact that numerous new journals promote themselves by promising publication within a few days (after payment!) is definite proof that no serious review is involved. This will result in diminishing quality and consequently eventually lead to loss of credibility and trust by society. Employers and discipline-oriented organizations should therefore advise their employees and members not to take any editorial position in any predatory journal. And, not less important, decision makers responsible for the quality of social activities (such as healthcare) should take measures to counteract the irrational growth of poorly qualified editors that should be gate keepers of the quality of healthcare.

Author contributions AJvL designed the study, carried out literature search, collected data and wrote the concept. ORvL carried out literature search, collected data, contributed to the discussion and commented on the concept. Both authors jointly worked on the revised version of the manuscript on the basis of the comments by the editor and reviewers on the original version.

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Declarations

Competing interests The authors declare that there are no competing interests.


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Authors and Affiliations

Olaf R. Van Loon¹  · A. J. (Tom) Van Loon² 

✉ A. J. (Tom) Van Loon
Geocom.VanLoon@gmail.com

Olaf R. Van Loon
olaf.vanloon@bs-ag.ch

- ¹ Therapy Department, Badstrasse 50, Schinznach-Bad CH-5116, Switzerland
- ² College of Earth Science and Engineering, Shandong University of Science and Technology, Qingdao, Shandong 266590, China